UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

New Play Development in English Canada, 1970-1990: Defining the Dramaturgical Role

BY

© Deborah Tihanyi

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall, 1994

ISBN 0-315-94903-1

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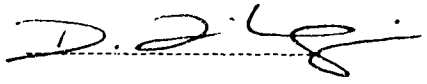

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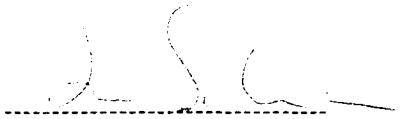

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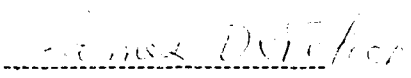

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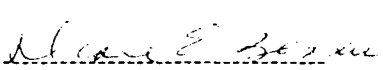

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ABSTRACT

Based on interviews with nine theatre professionals working in the area of new play development from 1970-1990 (Per Brask, Pamela Hawthorn, Urjo Kareda, D.D. Kugler, Kim McCaw, Judith Rudakoff, Jace van der Veen, Bob White and Svetlana Zylin), this thesis is an oral history exploring aspects of the role of the dramaturge in the growth of Canadian drama.

Fundamentally, it is an attempt to distinguish the dramaturgical contribution to the theatrical process from that of the playwright or the director; to interpret the dramaturge's role as that of a facilitator in the process of taking a play from its earliest incarnation to performance. Through their experiences--at organizations such as the New Play Centre, the Banff Playwrights' Colony and Tarragon Theatre--these nine individuals shed light on how the role emerged in Canada, what it is a dramaturge does and how they approach working with a playwright and a new play. As well, they share their views on the impact this type of work has had on the development of Canadian drama, and how this work can continue to make significant contributions to the country's theatre in years to come.

The thesis is organized into three different areas: the development of the dramaturge in Canada, the dramaturgical process and play development organizations, and the relationships between dramaturgy, play development and audience. The thesis also includes a fairly extensive bibliography relating to issues surrounding Canadian dramaturgy and playwriting, as well as a general reference section on dramaturgy taken from both European and North American sources.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my colleagues in the Drama Department (and particularly those in DRAMA 616, Research in Canadian Drama): Michael Benoit, Shawna Cunningham, Diane Hendrickson, Andrew Houston, Caroline Howarth, Joyce Miller, Sandra Nicholls, Steve Olson, Wendy Philpott, Vern Thiessen and Ken Williams. As well, many thanks to the faculty who helped me in various ways in starting and completing this thesis: James DeFelice, Alex Hawkins, Mary Blackstone, Carl Hare, and particularly Jan Selman for staying on as my supervisor and seeing the work through to its conclusion.

I would also like to thank Shirley Barrie, Don Hannah, Janet Hinton-Mann and Connie Massing for their thoughts from the playwright's perpective.

I am, of course, exceedingly grateful to Per Brask, Pamela Hawthorn, Urjo Kareda, D.D. Kugler, Kim McCaw, Judith Rudakoff, Jace Van Der Veen, Bob White and Svetlana Zylin, without whom this work would not have been written.

And thank you to my family, and most of all Richard, for several years of support and encouragement.

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An Introduction

As preface to that which follows, I will begin by stating what it is not. The following is not an attempt at an objective history of new play development in Canada during the specified period; nor is it an attempt to provide a complete record of the developmental work done by theatre companies, play development organizations and theatre professionals. It is not an attempt to set down definitive rules for working on new plays. And, finally, it is not a comprehensive guide to the contributions made by Canadians to this field over the course of two decades.

Because the work that follows is not an end, but a beginning: a beginning in the exploration of the work that has been done by certain individuals during the course of their careers in the Canadian theatre. It is a work based on interviews, an oral history: told in their own words, the accounts of how nine individuals have supported and encouraged Canadian playwrights and playwriting.

This work was begun primarily out of necessity. Because the development of new plays is a relatively new area in the Canadian theatre, there is precious little information about it in the usual places (books, journals), and the richest source of information--those theatre professionals actually involved in the process--has gone, for the most part, undocumented.

The nine theatre practitioners interviewed have, between them, a combined total of more than a century's experience in working with playwrights and new plays, and each has a unique way of approaching the work. And, in a sense, what they do defies classification: some call themselves directors, others call themselves dramaturges, yet the focus of their work is remarkably similar. Which leads to the first stumbling-block

in approaching this sort of work: what to call it?

The word "dramaturge" is still met with glazed eyes in many corners of the theatrical profession in Canada. Therefore, part of what has been attempted here is to clarify what that word means within a Canadian context. For ease of reference, however, the word "dramaturge" appears here interchangeably with "theatre professional working in new play development"--despite the fact that the word "dramaturge" can and does apply to more than working with playwrights and new plays. Several of the individuals interviewed resist the label quite strenuously; wherever possible, I have included their opinions on this issue. The main reason for using "dramaturge" and "dramaturgy" is to distinguish it as a specific type of work in the theatrical spectrum: not that of a playwright, not that of a director, not that of an actor, but of a facilitator or helper in the process of taking a play from its earliest incarnation to performance.

That being said, the interview process was focused on the dramaturgical process in working with new plays and playwrights--again, with some allowances for the titular preferences of the interviewees. In each of the nine separate interviews, questions were asked about the nature of the process: What does a dramaturge do and what is their obligation/ responsibility to the playwright? How does one approach working on a new play? What are the benefits/drawbacks to the various ways of working? And, beyond the hands-on work, questions were asked about the impact that this sort of work has had on the development of a body of Canadian drama over the past two decades, and how that work can continue in the future.

Again, as this is a subjective, oral history, each interview went off on its own distinctive tangent, largely due to the timing and setting of each interview (and what that particular individual was involved with at the time). This being the case, it may be appropriate here to provide some 'snapshots' of the particular interviews . . .

I interviewed Per Brask over lunch in a Winnipeg restaurant in May, 1991. At the time, in addition to teaching acting and directing at the University of Winnipeg, he was also working on a translation of *Hedda*

Gabler for the Manitoba Theatre Centre. Per called himself a dramaturge, and said that everything he does--teaching, writing, directing--feeds into his dramaturgical work. Formally trained as a dramaturge in Denmark, he has been able to bring his expertise to the Canadian theatre, variously as head of Playwrights' Workshop Montreal and dramaturge for Prairie Theatre Exchange in Winnipeg.

The interview with Pamela Hawthorn was done over the phone in May, 1991. After almost twenty years as Artistic Director of Vancouver's New Play Centre, she had left to work at Telefilm Canada as Manager of Creative Affairs. While she was quite willing to talk about her past work in the theatre within the play development context, she said she had little to contribute to the discussion of its future.

I spoke with Urjo Kareda, Artistic Director of Toronto's Tarragon Theatre, in February, 1992. With a background as a critic and as a dramaturge at Stratford, he stressed how lucky he felt to be a dramaturge who was also an artistic director. He said he felt the most important connection a dramaturge can make is with the artistic director of a company, because through that relationship the dramaturge provides a conduit for the playwright to enter a theatre.

Also in February, 1992, I had coffee with D.D. Kugler. At the time, he was resident dramaturge for Toronto's Necessary Angel Theatre, where he has worked very closely with Artistic Director Richard Rose, notably in writing adaptations. However, he has also worked across the country: for example, with the playwriting community in Saskatchewan, both as a dramaturge and as a director. At first he was unsure that he would have anything to say to me that I would find useful; interestingly enough, he did manage to speak for an hour on the subject.

I spent a few days at the Banff Playwrights' Colony during its final week in 1991. Kim McCaw had a great deal to say about the Colony and how it works, and we often had playwrights and their directors/dramaturges walking in and out of the office during our conversation. His background includes acting and directing, most notably at the Globe Theatre. At the time of the interview, Kim had just left

Prairie Theatre Exchange after being Artistic Director there for eight years, and, like Urjo Kareda, had something to say about how an artistic director of a theatre company can make an important contribution to play development activity.

Judith Rudakoff, a Toronto dramaturge and playwright, had many different things on the go when I interviewed her in July, 1991. In addition to teaching playwriting at York University, she was also working as a freelance dramaturge, and had just edited a book of essays. Over the course of her career, Judith has been a resident literary manager (at both Toronto Free Theatre/Canadian Stage Company and Theatre Passe Muraille), and has served on various committees for the Canada Council and Playwrights' Union of Canada. She has found many different structures within which to practice dramaturgy.

I interviewed Jace van der Veen in Edmonton on two occasions: once in his final days as director of the Alberta Conference for Theatre (ACT) in April, 1991, and then again two months later. Because of his involvement with ACT, Jace had a great deal to say on the subject of advocacy, and support for theatre in general and play development in particular. Over the course of his career he has worked in various capacities: as a teacher, as a director of new plays, and as Artistic Director of Edmonton's Northern Light Theatre. As well, at the time of the second interview, he was working one-on-one with playwright Lyle Victor Albert (who was also present for the last part of the interview).

I met with Bob White during his rehearsals of George Walker's *Love and Anger* at Calgary's Alberta Theatre Projects in March, 1991. We had dinner after one particular rehearsal and talked about the work he has done--primarily as a director--over the past twenty years. Having arrived at Toronto's Factory Theatre Lab in 1972 and declared his desire to be a dramaturge, he proceeded to do just that. His foray into directing some years later grew out of the fact that he felt he could do just as well--if not better--than some of the directors he had been working with. Although he did not want to be referred to as a dramaturge, he acknowledged that much of what he does as a director is informed by the dramaturgical work he has done in the past.

Svetlana Zylin, director, dramaturge and translator, was completing her tenure as Artistic Director of Playwrights' Workshop Montreal when I spoke with her in May, 1991. Much of our discussion was focused on her work there, and the significance of a free-standing play development organization in the national spectrum. Her views on the responsibilities of working as a dramaturge--ie. focusing entirely on the playwright's vision--were made very clear, especially in light of the fact that she was, at the time, leaving to pursue her own work as a director/ producer.

Having laid the foundation with these interviews, there are a number of things I hoped to achieve in the construction of this work. I sought to rectify the lack of first-hand accounts available on the subject of play development in Canada. As well, I attempted to provide a record of some of the significant contributions these individuals have made to the Canadian theatre. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I endeavoured to contribute to what I hope will be a continuing national dialogue on new play dramaturgy, and its influence on the growing body of Canadian drama.

A Note on Format . . .

The passages attributed to these individuals have been culled from written transcripts of taped interviews. The same questions were posed to each individual; out of their answers, I put together several sections on topics related to dramaturgy and new play development. In most cases, answers are clear in and of themselves. However, in some instances, I have included all or part of a question in order to clarify the nature of a response. For example:

> **Question:** You were saying that you have an ongoing working relationship with Joan MacLeod; do you feel that that's one of the things that's important? Does it make your job easier in terms of giving you a better sense of how to respond?
>
> **Answer:** Sure. It also enables you to watch as someone grows . . .

would appear as follows in the text:

> **URJO KAREDA:**
>
> [Developing an ongoing relationship with a playwright also] enables you to watch as someone grows . . .

CHAPTER ONE: The Development of the Dramaturge in Canada

In 1975, Peter Hay wrote an article for *Canadian Theatre Review* called "Dramaturgy: Requiem for an Unborn Profession." As the emphasis on the development of the Canadian play increased, so, too, did the questions about the role of the dramaturge in Canada. Hay outlines some of the functions of the dramaturge as he understands them, and explains why, at that time, Canadian theatres were not making the most of what dramaturges had to offer.[1] Some of Hay's concerns are equally valid today.

According to Hay, a dramaturge reads scripts and "represents the author's interests in a production,"[2] ensuring that "whenever their work is produced, the intention and integrity of their play is given the best and most communicative interpretation possible in the circumstances . . . . [The dramaturge] employs all his literary and critical skills, his own theatrical experience, to enhance [the new play]. He is the go-between, the interpreter of the author's ways to the director and vice-versa."[3] A dramaturge, in rehearsals toward a production, "makes sure that the interpretation which he and the director had agreed on in the relative tranquility prior to production, is adhered to, deepened and sharpened . . . . [He delivers] well-produced and instructive program notes . . . . [and serves the function of] in-house critic."[4] Hay outlines a significant role for dramaturges within a Canadian context.

However, one of the problems Hay cites is the fact that, in 1975, the dramaturge had little or no impact on helping the plays they read actually get produced, since the artistic director decides the seasons based on past successes, not on the potential of new scripts.[5] The theatres were frequently production-oriented, more concerned with producing plays that had promotional rather than artistic merit. He also says that the seasons of these theatres were so "hackneyed and imitative"[6] that a trained dramaturge is probably not even necessary. Furthermore, most "directors have such problems with their ego and personal insecurity that the idea of needing specialized assistance in dramaturgy is out of the question."[7] And, when a dramaturge's

services are used--as with those companies devoted to new play development--those people are only "at the apprentice level, lacking the background or experience which would command the necessary respect for their opinions from the directors."[8]

"Is the time yet ripe for the dramaturge in Canada?"[9] Hay asks. Almost twenty years later, Canadian theatre professionals are still asking the question--albeit in a slightly altered form. The concerns are perhaps no longer with regard to whether the function is effective in Canada--its continued practice in various forms attests to the need. Today's issues are more specific: who should be fulfilling that function, what should their training include, and how should they be working with a playwright?

Sky Gilbert's well-known diatribe against "stupid dramaturgy" in 1988[10], and a slightly less volatile article in 1991[11], presents an alternative perspective. In the former, he rails against the dramaturge in Canada, who, "having failed in every possible theatrical venue they decide on the one theatrical profession which . . . seems to require absolutely no talent."[12] ("Those who can, do; those who can't, edit, critique, and dramaturg")[13]

Gilbert discusses the abuse of power in the dramaturge-playwright relationship, saying that the dramaturge, like the psychiatrist, "has a stake in keeping the client incompetent."[14] In Gilbert's view, the dramaturge has a static idea of what constitutes a play--an opinion shaped, Gilbert says, mostly by the 1950s American tradition of Miller, Williams and Inge.[15] He claims that the dramaturge wants to determine the content of the playwright's work and have the playwright write the play that the dramaturge would write (if he/she could).[16]

Three years later, Gilbert tempers his view somewhat in stating that perhaps he is not against dramaturges *per se*, only bad ones.[17] He says that a good dramaturge "[starts] with the plawright's [sic] vision, untampered. The dramaturge states its prejudices right off the bat . . . . [and] finds out what the playwright

is trying to achieve with the word."[18] The dramaturge then works on helping the playwright "realize this vision . . . and the playwright USES the dramaturge in any way they wish (which is, conceivably, not at all!)."[19]

Both Hay and Gilbert reveal the frustrations of pursuing dramaturgy within a Canadian context. The legacy of the European model, it may be argued, is one that best describes dramaturgy at companies like Stratford and Shaw, devoted mostly to the interpretation of the classics. However, the European dramaturge has had some two hundred years to evolve: in its early incarnation in eighteenth-century Germany,[20] the dramaturge set out to encourage support for theatre through advising producers on what plays they should produce, providing general literary criticism and writing 'publicity pieces' on current productions in the theatre. Canada is a young country in which a variety of ethnic and cultural traditions exist, and one in which a cultural or dramatic tradition is still very much evolving. The current situation in the Canadian theatre parallels those German beginnings; in that sense, trying to make the current European model work in Canada is akin to running before one can walk.

The early days of new play dramaturgy in Canada saw the cumbersome effects of trying to impose these perceived notions of the current European model onto an emerging theatre. The position traditionally demanded the dramaturge be an associate to the artistic director of a company, reading plays and thus helping to select the season. However, in Canada in the early 1970s, there was not much of a body of original Canadian work to choose from. With the rise in nationalism--attributable, at least in part, to the fervour created by Expo '67[21]--that lack was exposed and sought to be rectified. Those theatre professionals concerned with developing Canadian drama had to go out and find it; they had to create an environment whereby writers would be attracted to the theatre. Thus the first role of the dramaturge in Canada was to create an atmosphere conducive to writers. And, following that, to help get the resulting plays produced.

PAMELA HAWTHORN[22]:

[Dramaturgy] was an adopted European idea. I mean, the large, repertory, state-run theatres in Europe always had this literary figure who worked in the theatres, and the name that became popularized for that position was 'dramaturge.' I think 'dramaturge' became a sort of fashionable buzz-word for that position. Now, what that usually means, I think, is an assistant to the artistic director, in that that person reads all the stuff that's around, and suggests to the artistic director, Here's a short list of five or ten or a hundred plays that I've read and I think would be interesting in the season; Why don't you take a look at these now, and then we can discuss them if you want to . . . I think it was always up to the artistic director how important a functionary that literary dramaturge was. But I think that they were essentially there to be an assistant or an associate to the artistic director to help select a season.

Part of what the role became--depending on the point of view of the theatre--was also to assist in the development of new plays (if the theatre was interested in that). Lots of dramaturges/literary managers just read the classics, and don't necessarily have anything to do with development. [However] I think that--over the last ten years particularly--we are beginning to see in Canada the emergence of that figure.

PER BRASK[23]:

If I put it crudely, I would say that the notion of the dramaturge in North America is very narrow, and is usually understood in the editor function that I described in that article[24]: someone who reads and analyzes plays, and perhaps is engaged in workshops with play- wrights, and so on and so forth. That's starting to change . . . .

BOB WHITE[25]:

We invented [new play dramaturgy]--my generation of people more or less invented it: we said--as I did--that we're going to do this job. So there's never been any kind of formal approach to how it happened. It's all tied up with what has happened to the culture over these past twenty years. It's very accidental, and it's very dependent upon who the people are and were, and where they were at a particular time and place. Circumstances and situations dictated an awful lot of the activity--more than an informed view of what dramaturgy was.

I don't think you can define the job; you can only define the people who are doing the job. Certainly my experience has been that you take people who are interested in new work, who are interested in whatever it is that your company is doing, and then you say, Well, one of the things we do here is we work with playwrights. And whatever their background is, you kind of bring

them along in terms of working with writers. It's all very common-sense; it's all very straightforward. It's all about developing a rapport with a certain writer, and getting them to trust you at a certain level. And then just literally working with them on the play. And, yes, you have to know how plays work, and have an instinct about how plays work. But, I think this kind of mythological thing that's happened around the job is very destructive. And I think the reason a lot of writers hate dramaturges is because they associate them with story editors at the CBC--the lowest form of human life.

[But] a lot of people are doing the function, to greater or lesser degrees. I think the function is important, *can* be important. Certainly, in the rehearsal process--what we're calling production dramaturgy now, I guess--I think it can be really, really helpful, in terms of getting the play the final one-tenth of the way into opening night. And, I obviously believe that it's helpful in the development process, through drafts and stuff like that . . . But, I'm leery of giving it more worth or credibility than it actually has. I think it's much handier--and much healthier--for someone to be a director, and occasionally fulfil a dramaturgical function.

SVETLANA ZYLIN[26]:

I think a large part of [the development of a body of Canadian drama] was by the commitment of a group of people to developing plays and playwrights. When I started in theatre in this country, our national repertoire was very, very small. And, because we didn't have a lot of role models within our own community, we were still very involved with imported work from America and Britain. It was important to set up structures within which a supportive environment could, in fact, encourage and facilitate writers--who may not normally have become playwrights--to work in a theatrical form. I know that the New Play Centre began out of the real need to address the fact that there were no regional voices within our theatres. So, I think for me--as well as for other people--it did come out of a strong nationalistic drive: if we were going to be working in theatre in this country, we wanted it to reflect our concerns and our needs. And, ... if there was no material, then you went out and found people whom you could excite about creating that material.

URJO KAREDA[27]:

I think, historically, the value of the dramaturge's role has been as a channel through which playwrights enter a theatre. I think [all theatres] should [have a dramaturge]--if they're interested in doing new work, there should be someone whose primary function that is. If that's the director's interest--if that director's particularly interested in new work--and feels he can make a commitment of time to it, I see no reason why it couldn't be a director.

It's hard to know [what role dramaturges have had in developing a body of Canadian drama]. Bill Glassco, who founded the Tarragon, always said that he was primarily a director, and that he

never understood dramaturgy because he could only help writers whose work he wanted to-direct--and then he could be very helpful because he brought those skills into play. But, however it happened, it still produced several generations of writers. I think the important thing is that--however it happens and who the actual players are or whatever their jobs are called--things get produced. That was clearly one of the roles I was asked to play when I was at Stratford[28]: to make sure that contemporary writers from this country got produced there; that there was a way for an organization so mired in a mandate that had nothing to do with new playwriting to participate. I think, in some cases, that's an important part to play: if it happens to be a dramaturge in an organization who can attract the writers, then that's an important function; if it's the artistic director himself, that's important too. Whatever brings people in and gives them a sense of possibilities is important. I've always thought, too, that a theatre that produces new plays--besides satisfying audience, etcetera--also shows potential writers out there that it's possible: there's an audience for this, there's a theatre that works on this. People do come in off the street and find out eventually that they're playwrights. Whatever oils that machine, whatever role you have, the important thing is that someone can go from working in their room on a script to seeing it produced--hopefully with some care and intelligence.

JACE VAN DER VEEN[29]:

I think what influence dramaturges have had is allowing the voice of the playwright to speak and develop. Bill Glassco is a good example of that--with David French especially. He created an atmosphere, and at the same time, I would imagine, set parameters--i.e. we've only got a small stage, so many actors, etc.--but nevertheless allowed, and nurtured. I think he's a very nurturing director.

Maybe I mention that because I see that in myself as well. I love to nurture, I love to push the playwright further: could you go farther, could you deepen it here, could you widen it there . . . and sometimes cut, too . . . .

I think that [is]. . . a major influence that the dramaturgical aspect of the director who directs new plays has had: coaxing and nurturing. Maybe that's a Canadian thing, too: not necessarily thinking that the project has to be the only important thing, but that the process is important, because in that process, things will happen that will make the product richer . . . .

BOB WHITE:

You know, I really hate the word--and I really hate to have to use it in terms of people that I'm working with--because I find it so limiting, and it creates so much tension. You just kind of want

to say, It's this person who's going to walk around the play with you, sort of . . . If it could be that, that would be great.

SVETLANA ZYLIN:

[The hostility towards dramaturges is] changing a little bit, but not enough. One has to recognize that the term 'dramaturgy' and 'dramaturge' is relatively new to Canada. And, as with any new position in a theatre community where everyone is hard-pressed to find an entrée into a theatre, I will be the first to admit that sometimes these positions are self-created, or often given to people who can just fulfil the title rather than looking at whether they are really qualified to fulfil the job. Because it is a new field, it has taken a long time for some people to recognize that it is very much about subjugating your own vision to the needs of the playwright--it's not about affecting change through hands-on interference. And, because so many of the dramaturges for so long were directors and producers who were working within producing theatres . . . . those people could not remove themselves from the needs of the production, and the needs of that theatre to produce a certain kind of work. So, playwrights would move into these theatres with work that they had already written, and slowly but surely sometimes that work would become subverted to reflect the needs of the mandate of that theatre, as opposed to respecting the individual voice of that playwright. And again, I think that [hostility] comes from producing theatres being totally misdirected in *assigning* dramaturges to playwrights when the playwright hasn't asked for it or been prepared for it.

KIM MCCAW[30]:

The argument that I put forward [is] that dramaturgy as such is not an innovation; dramaturgy connected to professional companies in Canada *is*.

There's a bit of a problem in all this. In one interpretation, at least, the playwright is completely powerless: they have to sit there and wait for a producer. And the playwright wants it to be done, needs it to be done. And that power relationship can be abused--and is abused, at times. At the same time, for the playwright, the only power that they have, in a way, is to say, You can't do my play. I think once the discussion has come to that stage, then you don't have a very productive relationship. At that point, it all falls apart: somebody isn't listening; somebody isn't able to hear; they're not talking the same language; they're not talking about the same play. This sounds like a marriage that was not meant to be. And that's where we get those unfortunate stories from.

These situations where a dramaturge is trying to persuade the writer to write a completely different play--I could never understand that. If that's the case, just pick a different play! [But] it does happen.

JUDITH RUDAKOFF[31]:

Dramaturgy is still such an undisclosed mystery in this country. There are so many people who have only come into contact with untrained, inexperienced, 'bad instinct' people, and they're willing to tar and feather us all with the same brush.

PER BRASK:

I think that nobody any longer disputes the fact that a dramaturge could be a very effective person to have around in the development of a new play, or in a new play workshop, as simply someone to whom the writer can go to discuss various kinds of issues about the way in which the story is operating: discuss them in a non-interested way, in that the dramaturge, in that situation, has already--by being present--stated that he/she is on the playwright's side.

SVETLANA ZYLIN:

[We are] now starting to educate playwrights into recognizing that the dramaturge is actually your advocate and your protector within the rehearsal situation. So I'm really pleased to see the growth of production dramaturgy, because it's within that area that I think our credibility will probably end up getting the biggest boost. Once playwrights understand that we're there to protect *their vision* and *their voice* . . . I think that, as well, there's a whole education process that has to take place [between] a director and a dramaturge: [they] need to learn how to talk to each other, with each other, in a new kind of way. You need to define the boundaries of your input to the playwright.

D.D. KUGLER[32]:

I don't have a problem with the word [dramaturge], as long as you're willing to accept that everyone defines it their own way. I don't have a set definition: it's defined by each role I take.

Can anybody [do this sort of work]? Yes. I think there is a certain type of person who ends up in this kind of work. But dramaturgy gets done regardless of whether there is a dramaturge there to do it. I'm not arguing against it being institutionalized; or that dramaturges are failures. Nor am I trying to argue that just because you have a dramaturge you're doing good work. I'm saying that even if a playwright doesn't have a dramaturge, somebody does that work with the playwright. Always--even if it's only the playwright putting on a different hat. Somebody has to do that work which is not spontaneous, has to look at that work from the point of view of the audience. You can't write from the point of view of the audience--how it's going to be received; and yet, somewhere in the process, you need to look at it from that point of view. How does it

come out? Is it doing what you want it to do? There may well be writers who just write spontaneously, just write one first draft, never think about it critically, and put it out there. But I think that's really in the minority. I think most writers go back, look at the work, make changes, and, as soon as they do that, they're bringing in another kind of thinking--and that's the kind of thinking that the dramaturge is involved in (in terms of play development, not in terms of production).

KIM MCCAW:

You can change the word if you want: that's pretty easy. You're never going to get any kind of a consensus. At the PACT annual meeting a [few] years ago, there was a session where someone was talking about new plays. At one point, somebody turned to Urjo and said, "Urjo, could you give a little summary of the Tarragon's new play development activity?" And he just got this look of *pain* on his face, and he said, "Oh God, I think if ever there's a hell it'll be a room where we all have to sit around and discuss play development."

In that sense, everybody's got a different approach. For some of us, it works, and for some of us, it doesn't. Sometimes we have failures, and sometimes we have successes. Sometimes a relationship with a writer works, sometimes it doesn't. There's no real model as such. I think all of the people who--for the most part--are successful at it are constantly adjusting and responding and walking around the block and saying, I'm going to try something else here. You've got to; it's a *creative* process. It's a process that develops in itself. It's like what I wrote in *The Canadian Voice*[33]: I have a terror of assuming this kind of 'expert' role, because, ultimately, I don't really know anything. I mean, you know what you know, and you read the play, and try and understand what it is. And I think ultimately you try and find a respect for that and you try and put yourself in the heart and the mind of the playwright and see where this play is going--and then tell them what you see. If you're trying to make the play into your own play, then why don't you write it yourself--if it's that easy.

JUDITH RUDAKOFF:

Dramaturgy teaches the skill and the craft of play-making, and helps people who have the talent and an idea to then take it that step past the initial spark and that incredible first draft that's all over the place. If you had a dollar for every brilliant person that had a phenomenal first draft that never went anywhere and fell apart, you'd probably be very rich. But it takes more than the stamina to continue; it's a skill to be able to then, sometimes, let go of the initial impulse or the extraneous material and actually get to the heart of what it is that the person is trying to communicate: that's the role of the dramaturge. To be the midwife that ensures safe delivery of the newborn play.

Because of the novelty of dramaturgy in Canada, its practice has, at times, been less than helpful. And, those instances where 'bad dramaturgy' has been imposed on playwrights have perhaps coloured the perception of what a dramaturge does and can do. The dramaturge's role, broadly speaking, is to assist the playwright in the critical process that must take place in the development of a play. As Don Kugler points out, one cannot write from the point of view of the audience; that second step, that critical reassessment of the initial, spontaneous work, must take place in order for the play to proceed towards production.

Of course, there is the hazard of the dramaturge who fulfils that critical function assuming a stance of greater expertise than that of the playwright. The dramaturge must not try to define content, must not attempt to change what the playwright has to say, or even how they say it; rather, the dramaturge's critical focus encourages the writer to step back from the work and assess the efficacy of the way in which the text communicates. Theatre is, by its very nature, a communicative art form. At some point--whether the function is being fulfilled by the director, dramaturge or playwright--this communicative factor has to be considered. The dramaturge deals in these elements of theatrical communication. Of course, how each dramaturge approaches this task is different . . .

URJO KAREDA:

> I think [the dramaturge] has to be a facilitator: support and help develop the playwright's vision of the piece, and, in a sense, coax that piece out of the writer--using whatever skills, tricks, pleading that are suitable--and have the ability to adapt the process to every particular playwright's personality, needs and working methods. You have to be very sensitive to the fact that the playwright is the one that's writing the play. There's a point at which the dramaturge has to say, "I don't know" or "I can't take you there; I can't answer that for you; I can't do that for you." Another thing is that I think you have to be very careful to separate dramaturgy from analysis. Often, the problem is something that dramaturgy can't solve; sometimes the problem is something much deeper than that. I don't think we have the right to presume to meddle in people's psychology or emotional make-up . . . . I think [analysis is] absolutely forbidden; it can be extremely dangerous.
>
> People think that being an artistic director or a dramaturge is a real ego-satisfaction, but it's really the opposite: your own ego never comes into play because you're always trying to make things

possible and useful for other people. It's a very chameleon kind of job, because you have to shape your personality and instincts. Of course you bring your experience to bear, too, but you basically have to be someone who is useful, supportive and also challenging to the other person--without sending them into a tailspin or giving them a false notion of the level that something's at.

SVETLANA ZYLIN:

Part of the thing about dramaturgy is that in order to be good at it you constantly have to subjugate your own sense of vision and your own sense of aesthetic to someone else's needs--which is important and necessary and good. And, it's been really, really good training for me in terms of being able to see both sides of the issue when I come to my own writing, or directing my own work. But you're very much the facilitator, the mediator: the medium, as it were. I've worked on plays and been very good as a dramaturge on them, but they haven't necessarily been the kind of plays that I would want to be working on as a director, for instance; nor are they necessarily the plays that I would want to be writing myself. First and foremost I have to have a commitment that that play or that writer has a contribution to make to the national spectrum. As a result of that, the stronger we become nationally, the likelier it is that we'll become a strong international force as well.

BOB WHITE:

I do have all these skills that I developed--for the first ten years of my career--as a dramaturge. And yes, while I still have them all, they're changing radically. For the longest period of time, I could be 'Doctor Dramaturge': I could work on any play. Now--although I can still certainly do that--I find myself unable to really engage myself in a script unless I really like it, or I'm really interested in its potential. That's when I do my best work. Otherwise, I get really lazy, and I just don't care: at a certain point I still do the job, but I might as well be digging ditches, if it's not a script that I'm really interested in or excited about. There's been a real selfish kind of shift there over the years.

I don't know what it is [that I do] . . . and, you're often wrong, too. I think part of it is that it becomes so idiosyncratic for me: there are things that *only I* like, but I *still* like them, and I'm not about to give them up! . . . . You learn to trust your own sensibility after a while--for right or for wrong. And the ultimate thing is that if I've still got a job, I guess I do enough things right.

PER BRASK:

[Dramaturgy is] a creative function by the mere fact that if you're dealing with play development,

> for example, you are dealing in a collaborative situation in which there are at least the two people: the dramaturge and the playwright. And, if you want, you could say that that is parallel to--not the same as--a director working with an actor, in that the job is to tickle the fancy in someone: to tickle the fancy in someone sufficiently to reinvestigate the play in such a way that hopefully the end product is more exciting than what you started out with, delivers the territory more effectively than what you started out with. It doesn't always happen--but then you can go back to what you started with.
>
> . . . . A dramaturge has certain kinds of responsibilities in a performance event, which are different from those of a director. In the same way, in the development of a new play, a dramaturge obviously has a different role to play than the playwright has to play. But the event itself is collaborative, and therefore the dramaturge--if the work is well done--is part of the creation of the event, in very much the same way as the editor is in publishing . . . .
>
> The structure which a dramaturge is involved in is the manner in which it is possible to either link or make simultaneous various kinds of action. So the dramaturge is constantly working in a situation in which there is a balance between the linkage of events and the simultaneity of events. Where these things intersect, and how they intersect in the most effective manner, I believe, is the focus of the dramaturge's work. In any situation, whether this is in new play development, or whether this is in a performance situation. A dramaturge is constantly working with linkage and simultaneity.

Facilitator. Mediator. Medium. The dramaturge creates a support system for the playwright. Of course, the dramaturge brings a certain range of skills and experience to bear on the work, but each situation must be tailored to the specific playwright and their individual needs. The dramaturge, in each instance, must, of necessity, subdue their own agenda and adopt the playwright's point of view. There should never be any questions as to who is writing the play. The dramaturge attempts to enter the playwright's unique world, and helps them in the task of bringing others--director, actors, designers, and, ultimately, audience--into that world as well.

Of course, putting aside one's own agenda or ego is no easy task. Again, perhaps it takes a specific kind of person who is, by their very nature, nurturing. However, one may argue--as some have--that because of this essential requirement, it can be dangerous to work on any play or with any playwright that does not excite the dramaturge's own sensibilities. If the collaboration between dramaturge and playwright is to be

successful, then it is certainly in everyone's best interests that the dramaturge is committed personally to the work, and has the utmost respect for it.

Beyond that commitment, however, are there any other special skills required of the dramaturge working with playwrights and new plays? What sort of training or background is required?

D.D. KUGLER:

Do I [have knowledge of playwriting craft]? I don't know. Does anyone? Can you teach it? What is it--do you learn the seven basic rules? I don't know. I don't really have training as a dramaturge; I don't have a degree as a dramaturge. I have training in English Literature, training as a director, training as an actor; I just started calling myself a dramaturge because it seemed that it was the function I was serving . . . It seemed like the appropriate title for what I was doing.

KIM MCCAW:

I'm primarily a director. I came into dramaturgy kind of out of necessity; that wasn't my first path in the theatre. The reason that I became involved in dramaturgy was that I became Artistic Director of a company that had to produce new plays . . . . There is a real tension there sometimes--which doesn't necessarily lead to a failure of the artistic production. Particularly if you're the Artistic Director, there is always that danger that you're making a decision or you're forcing a decision on a writer that is driven by the need of the *production* rather than the need of the *play*. That's a real danger--there's no question about it--especially if you're in a situation where you're either just going into rehearsal or in rehearsal; there are times when you say, The end of the act--it's just too long! . . . it's different in each case. I don't have a 'method'; I don't have a particular thing I do. It comes out of who is this writer, and how do they work?

BOB WHITE:

'The dramaturges that I have trained'--the Rina Fraticellis, the Jackie Maxwells, the Kathy Flahertys--I didn't 'train' them: they were just able to come into a situation where I was able to give them a job, and they were able to work along with me. I was able to encourage them to just do what they want: respond as instinctual people to the work as opposed to some sort of prescribed notion of what a play is, or what a writer is. That's where you learn. And . . . there aren't too many opportunities for that . . . you've got to find someone who's going to take you under their wing. And that's very hard, because everyone in this business tends to be very

insecure and very shy. It wasn't *easy* for me to walk into the Factory on that October day in 1972, and say, Hi, I'm a dramaturge--no easier than it is for anyone. Because to me it was like, What do I know? I was twenty-three years old, I was in Toronto for the first time in my life, and I'm walking into this sleaze-bag, awful, horrible place . . . and thinking, Is this the Future? . . . . At a certain point you have to decide that this is what you're going to do, and come hell or high water you're going to find a way to do it. And that's why the personal initiative--be it hooking up with someone, or finding a group of people whom you're going to do theatre with, or whatever the situation is--is the only way in fact that you're going to survive. You've got to develop that kind of stamina--that kind of dealing with the knocks that a basically indifferent culture is going to give you.

PER BRASK:

The other things that I do feed into what I do as a dramaturge. Yes, I do direct, and yes, I write, but predominantly I do those things in order to become a better dramaturge. These are exercises for me. For example, I write fiction, I write poetry, and I write drama; for me, that has a lot to do with knowing the language that I work in, and exploring the language that I work in. And for me, when I sit and I write something, it has a lot to do with exercising these notions of rhetorical strategies. I find it fairly simple to transpose, if you like, from a poem--a lyrical structure--to a notion of dramatic action. Because involved in the poem itself is a gesture, and the understanding of what that gesture could be in a dramatic situation. I think that it's hard to improve as a dramaturge if one doesn't do these things, because there aren't situations in which a bunch of dramaturges get together--with writers and directors and actors--and investigate the theatrical event from the perspective of the dramaturge . . . . If I hadn't directed, I wouldn't be able to tell you what I think the difference is between directing and dramaturgy. In that situation in which you're dealing with a group of actors, or a designer, or you're dealing with a text that has to get up there in three and a half weeks--it's a totally different concern than when I step outside of that and start to think about it as a dramaturge. Naturally, if I'm directing something, that's what happens to me: there is that intense building of moments that happens in the job of the director--to engage in a situation in such a way that the construction of this notion of moments takes place, and that they follow. Sometimes you just have to put on this other hat. And yes, directors do that themselves, too; but if you have a dramaturge intervening at that point, it simply makes life easier for everyone concerned.

Much of what I teach--when I teach acting, for example--is about [dramaturgy]. How do you encounter a text? What do you do when you encounter a text? How do you respond to the question of the text? How do you use that? How do you construct a performance out of it? In other words, at what point do you make it *your performance*, and let go of the text? That's the key issue I deal with with my acting students. I tell them, You will often hear that a text is a blueprint for a performance, a blueprint for a show--I don't want you to think about that; I want

you to think about the text as a pair of figure skates, and I want you to put on these figure skates, and dance. So that the focus is your performance: how do we construct your performance out of your reaction to this text, out of the questions that this text asks of you--but your answers are as important to that as the questions that the text asks. And that's what we construct the performance out of. And, of course, that happens with both very traditional notions of what it is an actor does, and some other notions. So therefore, in that situation, it overlaps--because it becomes a matter of involving an actor in asking some of the questions a dramaturge would naturally ask. And some of those questions are not necessarily those that actors are normally taught to ask. The actor must start to think not simply about the act of interpretation--the act of this character--but the act of performance: What happens now? What does the script allow me to do? How far can I go?

JUDITH RUDAKOFF:

I think . . . all [the things I do] feed into each other; I don't understand how anybody can do only *one* thing at a time--that's just my nature. Not everybody works like that; a lot of people who are working in any one of those occupations see it as their sole vocation. I've always ended up in positions where I was working with people I was training--whether it was formally or in apprenticeships--and that required me to draw upon all of my areas of experience. I don't think you can ever isolate these jobs and draw lines between them in a really hard and fast way: if you find somebody who is a dramaturge who isn't a playwright or a teacher, you'll probably find that they're a director; or, if you find somebody who is a playwright who's not a teacher or dramaturge, you may find that they're an actor as well. It's part and parcel of the art form that everything relates to everything else. Some people are a bit more conscious of the fact that they do more than one thing--although they don't always do it at the same time. We have all had to develop in many different areas in a skilled and sophisticated way in order to survive.

BOB WHITE:

Whether or not it exists as a job by itself I'm not sure. Because there are not too many people that I know in this country--in fact, none--who are 'just dramaturges' that I have any kind of real respect for. And, historically, over the twenty years, I can't think of too many where I've thought, This person really knows what they're doing. Because, if you're disassociated from the process of getting the play on, then you don't know what to look for in the play, or what the dynamic is. The play does not exist as a thing, but as a produced entity: something to be produced. And for someone who doesn't know the hell of producing a play, and what it takes to get any kind of show on . . . I don't think they can be very helpful to a writer.

URJO KAREDA:

I think, being a critic, you're always very responsive; you go to theatre and someone starts you. You become very adept at trying to understand your own response to something and trying to find a way of articulating it--always in terms the creative person has set. If you think the play doesn't work, you say, Here are the terms that the playwright set for this piece, and I think it doesn't work for such and such reasons--not necessarily because I don't agree with those original terms, but because those things weren't made clear. I think it trains you to be very responsive.

. . . . I have no idea. I have no idea where you start. There are now people who want to do it or--something terrifying--want to study it; I have no idea how you do it. I guess there are situations now--because there are . . . so many workshop situations and fringe situations--where people can try it. I think that the only thing you can do--the same way as people who want to direct--is find a writer and a script that you're interested in working with, and go through the process and see if you like it, see if you think it's useful.

D.D. KUGLER:

I don't think the training matters at all [in doing dramaturgical work]. If I got good advice from a guy in the street, I'd still consider it good advice. And, if someone was hugely trained and gave me what was maybe good advice, but not something I'd consider useful, then it's still not useful. I'm not arguing against training, but the bottom line is whether it's useful or not.

And, if dramaturges have, indeed, had some influence in developing a body of Canadian drama over the past twenty years, what can we look forward to from future generations?

JUDITH RUDAKOFF:

The only reason I ended up as a dramaturge in a theatre company is because I carved a niche, because I was tenacious, and because I found money where there was no money . . . . You have to [make yourself indispensable]. You have to do more than appears humanly possible . . . . the more places you [can] infiltrate, and the more different places in that theatre you [can] make yourself indispensable . . . you [become] a virus. And, if you [are] a virus that [infiltrates] all areas of the being of the theatre, then they [cannot] afford to lose you . . .

PER BRASK:

I think it's up to dramaturges to demonstrate that they are needed. So therefore, one normally

> will end up working with directors and so on and so forth, and infrequently one gets to work in a performance situation which is more collaborative than the traditional way. But if one ends up working with various directors, there are certainly ways in which one can demonstrate the contribution that one can make--in dealing with new texts as well as classical texts.

The impact a dramaturge has on the development of a new script may vary; a playwright is by no means obligated to use material that has come out of their consultation with a dramaturge. However, the process in itself has to occur; at some point, the playwright goes back to their play and examines it critically--either on their own or with someone else. And that process is dramaturgical. The emergence and identification of that process as an integral part of new play development is evidence that the dramaturge has a part to play in Canadian theatre.

The development of the dramaturgical role in Canada is inextricably linked to the nature of theatrical process. Because theatre is collaborative, each role is defined in terms of the roles around it. In that sense, any one working in the theatre should at least have a working knowledge of each of the elements involved in putting together a production. In the case of the dramaturge--in particular the dramaturge working with new plays--the knowledge of the whole of theatrical process is crucial. In working with a new play, a dramaturge must not only be able to respond to the play, but to articulate that response to the playwright. And, that response is only useful insofar as it is related to the nature of the text as something to be performed. Thus a dramaturge must be familiar not only with text, but with the realities of performance.

New play development has clearly become a focal point of the Canadian dramaturge. Fulfilling this dramaturgical function in Canadian theatre consists of creating an atmosphere where playwrights can practice their craft; and, as evidenced by those individuals working in the new play arena, that function does not exist in a vacuum. Unlike its European counterpart, the Canadian dramaturge seldom specializes in the one area. In Canada, it seems, in order to be most effective in their role, the dramaturge must venture beyond it.

Notes

1. Peter Hay, "Dramaturgy: Requiem for an Unborn Profession," *Canadian Theatre Review*, No. 8 (Fall, 1975), pp. 43-6.

2. Ibid., p. 44.

3. Ibid., p. 44.

4. Ibid., p. 44.

5. Ibid., p. 43.

6. Ibid., p. 45.

7. Ibid., p. 45.

8. Ibid., p. 45.

9. Ibid., p. 45.

10. Sky Gilbert, "The Canadian Playwright's Survival Guide or, a concise guide to saving your play from stupid dramaturgy," *CanPlay*, vol. 5, No. 1 (Feb., 1988), pp. 8-10.

11. Sky Gilbert, "Focus on Dramaturgy: Our Challenge! Two Artistic Directors Offer Their Views," *The Canadian Voice*, Winter, 1991, pp. 1-2.

12. Sky Gilbert (1988), p. 8.

13. Ibid., p. 8.

14. Ibid., p. 8.

15. Ibid., p. 9.

16. Ibid., p. 9.

17. Sky Gilbert (1991), p. 2.

18. Ibid., p. 2.

19. Ibid., p. 2.

20. See G.E. Lessing, *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, c. 1767. Lessing's work was commissioned in order to generate support for German theatre, at a time when its dramatic traditions were still in their infancy.

21. Telephone Interview with Pamela Hawthorn, May 8, 1991.

22. Telephone Interview with Pamela Hawthorn, May 8, 1991.

23. Personal Interview with Per Brask, May 7, 1991.

24. Per Brask, "Dran Turgia," *Canadian Theatre Review*, No. 49 (Winter, 1986), pp. 11-14.

25. Personal Interview with Bob White, March 29, 1991.

26. Personal Interview with Svetlana Zylin, May 24, 1991.

27. Personal Interview with Urjo Kareda, February 18, 1992.

28. Urjo Kareda was Literary Manager at the Stratford Festival from 1975 to 1980.

29. Personal Interview with Jace van der Veen, April 23, 1991 and June 14, 1991.

30. Personal Interview with Kim McCaw, June 20, 1991.

31. Personal Interview with Judith Rudakoff, July 11, 1991.

32. Personal Interview with D.D. Kugler, February 18, 1991.

33. Kim McCaw, "Focus on Dramaturgy: Our Challenge! Two Artistic Directors Offer Their Views," *The Canadian Voice*, Winter, 1991, pp. 1-2.

CHAPTER TWO: The Process: Dramaturges, Dramaturgy and Play Development Organizations

There are as many ways to approach new play dramaturgy as there are dramaturges. Each individual has their own way of approaching a given text and communicating with a playwright. As well, the environment in which the dramaturge and playwright are working may have a significant influence on the nature of their relationship, and the outcome of the work.

Each of the individuals interviewed had a chance to develop and refine their dramaturgical skills over many years. For more than twenty years, they have been at the forefront of many of the play development initiatives and organizations that have sprung up during that time. As a result, any discussion of their methods must of necessity include the programs and institutions they have founded, headed or worked with.

This chapter will focus on the practical applications of dramaturgy in the play development process, both from an individual and an organizational perspective. The former will include observations on how a dramaturge begins to build a relationship with a playwright, while the latter will examine how their involvement with certain theatre companies and play development organizations has created atmospheres that support the playwriting process.

The initial contact between dramaturge and playwright is crucial, as is the dramaturge's first reading of the particular play. The dramaturge's primary response to the work is what may open up the discussion: their thoughts on what they have perceived the play to convey. Through these conversations, then, the dramaturge describes their response to the play; the playwright, in turn, begins to form an idea of how their original ideas are being received through the text. It is a process of analysis, of critical exploration.

It seems that--especially during the first drafts of a play--a dramaturge can be useful in taking on that analytical role. The work done on the play may include discussion of theme, style and structure--both of

the play as a whole and in line-by-line detail. Often the dramaturge works by asking questions, through initiating dialogue. Within this dialogue, the playwright is encouraged to talk through the work; what they come away with is entirely of their own choosing, and sometimes only an indirect result of the dramaturgical input.

PER BRASK:

. . . [How I work] depends on the text--this is where I don't think there's any sort of rule. The first thing that has to happen is that I need to sort out whether my response to the text--after I've read it for the first time--has anything to do with what the playwright has been thinking about. My response to the text could be completely off-base. And whether it is off-base or not is fine, but I need to find out. And then if my reaction *is* completely off-base, then I need to find out whether it is off-base in relation to what it is the playwright wants to deal with. Then I have to find out whether I read it under circumstances that were not conducive to my thinking properly, or whether the playwright indeed hasn't dealt with what he/she wants to deal with.

. . . I say, What's at the core of this for you? What's at the core of this investigation for you? What question did you ask yourself? What brought you to sit down in this lonely place with your word-processor, and write these words? And the conversation begins. And then we start to look at whether there is a coherence between what's on that page--what we can agree is on that page--and what the writer is telling me. And sometimes--on rare occasions--you find out that what the writer has written is more interesting than what the writer *thought* he/she had written. That does happen. In some cases, the writer has written what they had set out to write, but not particularly well; it was just a matter of getting that first draft out so it's on the page. A lot of writers start that way: Just let me get it down, and then . . . So it's down, and then you look at it, and it's pretty bland, straight-forward--Why should I sit through this? And then you say, Alright, this is what you want to deal with, and this is the story you have constructed so far: is there any other way of telling this story, or is there another story that tells this better? Now that we know what the territory is, is there a different story . . . If it's a traditional piece--which a lot of them are--is the story actually about the person that will bring the most interesting and most effective aspects to the territory? Is that where the centre is?

D.D. KUGLER:

I would rather just ask the questions: Is this what you're attempting to do?--because I don't see that happening for such and such a reason; if you want that to happen, then maybe it could happen if this were more like this and this were more like this--but these are the things that are preventing me from seeing it your way. I also might say, This is what I *do* see, for these reasons, and maybe

that's what you're trying to write. If I see the work going in one direction, but the writer wants it to go in another--I ask them, What do you really want to do? Do you want to make it go in the direction you *intend*, or do you want to keep going in the direction you're *writing*? That makes it sound simple, and it's not.

For me, there are two crucial aspects of writing. One is much more intuitive, spontaneous and not rational, and that's the real juice of the writer, that's where the imagination springs from. If that's controlled and manipulated by a dramaturge in the early stages, then you tend to end up with formulaic writing. But, there is a secondary stage; if you only have that first burst, then you only have first drafts. Even if a writer doesn't work with a dramaturge, I assume they go back and start to read their draft critically and start to make changes. Then, a different kind of imagination comes into play: more rational and analytic. That's where I come in, usually--at that second stage. The spontaneous element seems to be in total control of the playwright; I'm there to facilitate the other part--I'm not there to generate ideas or have inspirations, that comes from them. I'm there to facilitate the analytic part, which is more about *craft*: honing, shaping, and bringing that inspired work to the point where it will work effectively on stage.

Now, whether I take on that role, or whether it's the spouse, or the best friend, or the admired teacher--someone always serves that role. Everyone has to have someone they can talk to about their writing, because they can get lost inside it. I know when I'm adapting something, it inevitably gets to the point where all choices seem equal. Then I turn to someone else and say, This is why I like this choice, this is why I like that choice--what do you think? And the discussion goes along. And ultimately, what I choose may have nothing to do with what they actually say, but with something that occurred to me during the discussion. So, it's not so important that the playwright follows anything that I say, but that it serves as a spark to shape their own thinking about their work; a catalyst to that secondary aspect of their work, which is much more rational and more about craft.

BOB WHITE:

The interesting thing is that for the longest period of time, whatever way '*I*' did play development was the '*best*' way, and whatever way that everybody else did it . . . well, that wasn't the right way to do it. I don't know, maybe it still happens, but I'd like to think that as we get older we get a lot more mature about these things and realize that there are a lot of different ways to do it--in the same way that there are a lot of different ways to rehearse a play, a lot of different ways to do a play--and that they all have their valid points, they all have their failings and weaknesses. But for the longest time there was an awful lot of that kind of protection in order to justify yourself. Because all that money was always coming from the Canada Council, and therefore you had to 'develop a play development system' that was 'right' . . . and for yours to be right, the other guy's had to be wrong. I think that's changed.

A playwright can always work with someone else. And that's one thing you learn, too: that in fact you are not God; that you can't do everything; that you can't be everything to everybody. There are certain kinds of writers that you're going to relate to better, and certain kinds of work you're going to relate to better. And, you'd best do what you do best, and not say, Oh, well, sure, *I can do anything*--because that's just not true. Sometimes, in the long run, somebody else might serve the playwright better, and may be able to get more things out of the script than you can. The playwright may be able to respond to someone else with a different style than you have . . . All those sorts of things.

SVETLANA ZYLIN:

. . . It depends on the playwright. I consider every relationship with every playwright to be unique and individual. I also work as a director and as a producer, so, depending on my relationship with any individual playwright, that type of work can extend from basic developmental dramaturgy to directing a production. It depends on the needs of the playwright; it also depends on where else that playwright has access to resources.

I have worked in a number of different ways with a number of different playwrights. Some playwrights simply want me to read their scripts and give them feedback on structure; other playwrights want a much more minute line-by-line criticism of intention; other playwrights need me to be intensely involved in a workshop with them--sometimes as a director, sometimes as a dramaturge (again, depending upon where we think my input is going to be most effective). For example, on certain scripts it has been more useful for me to function as the director in a workshop, because through facilitating the actors to make them aware of the particular nature of that script, I have been able to demonstrate to the playwright where the intentions work and don't work. Whereas in other cases, it is better served to have another person be the director--to deal with the actors--so that I can deal with a much more intimate one-on-one kind of a relationship with the playwright.

I can't say that there is a consistent methodology or a specific kind of practice that I have. Most of the work that I do with playwrights is as a result of several initial in-depth conversations about their work, and about the way they like to work, and about what their expectations are . . .

JACE VAN DER VEEN:

. . . Every director has a different approach, I guess, to new plays. My approach came to be the challenge in directing a new play, and at that time that also meant dramaturging a new play. The challenge is to find the style that the playwright has placed into the play. Sometimes that style is 'derivative' insofar as the playwright is very influenced by another playwright; sometimes the style

is totally original. In most cases, it is a combination of the two. But, as much as every playwright is an individual, each play has its unique, individual style. And the challenge is to find that style: that's the exciting thing for me.

I haven't worked very much as a director with a dramaturge on a play; and, I've only worked a little bit as a dramaturge with somebody else directing. Mostly it has been dramaturging and directing at the same time.

I remember directing a play where we had a dramaturge from New York (Horizon Playwrights): she was wonderful. She dramaturged two plays out of four that we were doing, each with a different director. And so, she had to divide her time, which was okay, because it gave us time on our own as well. But that's where I learned how wonderful it is for a dramaturge to make sure that, thematically, the playwright and the director understand each other: to get to the theme of the play, as well as the style, but the theme especially, out of which style often grows. She would come in, and check whether that theme was being stuck to; whether the approach--the original approach--was being stuck to. If we had veered from it, then she would make us *aware* of that fact: not necessarily say we had to change it, but just make us aware . . . And, changing it meant, perhaps, changing other things as well; keeping it meant something else.

PAMELA HAWTHORN:

I guess the bottom line is trust. There has to be a trust level between the writer and whoever is working with him in order for anything productive to happen. There has to be professional trust there.

Now, once that's said . . . We [have] tried all sorts of different ways in our lifetimes to do things: some of them worked some of the time, and some of them didn't some of the time. Basically, through the years, the most common approach--for me, working with writers--was a combination of very intensive one-on-one sessions--between myself and the writer--and the workshop. In the one-on-one sessions, you would go over a new draft, over directions to go, and that kind of thing, where you were just like an editor of a novel--an editor working for a publishing company--with the writer . . . . We would mix into that, periodically, what we called at the New Play Centre a workshop--and that always meant that actors would come in. The workshop took many different forms: sometimes it was just straight reading and discussion; sometimes we would actually get certain scenes up on their feet, and work them like a rehearsal; sometimes we would simply bring actors in for a few hours and prepare a kind of glossy reading, sort of like doing a radio show--we would try to bring it up to scratch in some kind of fast performance kind of way--and throw it out in front of a small audience so that we'd get some kind of feedback. We did all sorts of different programs like that, but we didn't do them with every play (we did some with some, etcetera, etcetera). But I think the fundamental way that I worked--and that probably was the most common

> way of working within the New Play Centre--was a combination of the one-on-one thing mixed in with a workshop system.

The workshop is often an intermediary step between the initial phases of a play's creation and full production. The dramaturge may become the director at this point--bringing out elements of the script for the playwright through the performance or reading by actors--or, a director may be brought in to work with the actors separately. The reading of the play in a workshop setting can be as simple as sitting around a table with scripts, or more elaborate, with the actors up on their feet and some simple blocking. The main goal is to allow the playwright to hear, and see, their play: to be able to experience, at least in part, how their play works in performance.

The dramaturge must have a very clear sense of what the playwright hopes to achieve in the workshop. Thus, if a playwright chooses to elicit comments from the actors participating in the workshop--or even an audience, if one is present--then the workshop will take a certain form; if the playwright simply needs to hear the reading and then go back to his/her work, it will take another. The dramaturge can be most useful in these situations in making certain the playwright's goals are not obstructed.

> **URJO KAREDA:**
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> [The usefulness of the workshop] depends [upon] what that process leads to. There are plays in this country that have been workshopped several times--and that is as far as they will go. Dennis Foon used to say that he had one play that had been workshopped more times than any play in the history of the Canadian theatre!
>
> [Fifteen] years ago, I would say that workshops were a kind of consolation prize; you workshopped plays you weren't really committed to producing, but you wanted to do something with them and start some kind of working relationship with a writer. From a working theatre's point of view--and that is how I think we're [Tarragon Theatre] different from a Banff or Playwrights' Workshop, because we actually produce--once money became tight, the workshop-as-consolation-prize disappeared. We put our workshop resources into something we were very committed to producing because it was part of the evolution of that piece. We would know going into that workshop that somewhere down the road there *would* be a production--we wouldn't wait until after the workshop to make our decision.

There are also organizations that workshop in limbo; that is very difficult, because who are you workshopping for? It always has to be the playwright's workshop, and the playwright has to be either experienced enough or strong enough to know what he's looking for from a workshop--otherwise a director can take over, or actors can take over, and you can come out of the workshop process with something that is not, in fact, the *playwright's* vision of the piece, but a *collective* vision of the piece. And, if members of that group are not going to take that piece any further, then the play is not necessarily any further ahead than if the workshop hadn't happened.

The difficult thing is for playwrights to take command of the workshop process and say, This is what I want to discover; this is what I'm looking for. Of course, more experienced playwrights know that, and they know what to listen to and what to ignore. For a young playwright, I think a workshop can be very dangerous.

PER BRASK:

Who was it that said about the novel--I can't remember who said it--that a novel is never finished, it's abandoned. And I think the same probably holds true about the play, or a theatrical event of any kind: there comes a certain point at which you say the next step must take place, and you move on. So no, you can always continue to work on it, but there comes a point where you have to realize that this is not just about a text on a piece of paper--this needs to get into a rehearsal situation, this needs to get in front of an audience. And there are some things that we learn from putting things in front of an audience that we cannot learn in any other way.

. . . There are many things that you can get out of a workshop process as a first step, or even as a sixteenth step. But I think workshops of plays that are not scheduled for immediate performance, or performance in the following season, are kinds of exercises--and those exercises may be necessary, if only to develop muscle tissue. The only way anybody learns any of this is by doing: not thinking about doing it, but doing it.

D.D. KUGLER:

We schedule readings, or workshops, when we think they would serve the playwright. If we get to a block, where we can't work any more in a room together, we may need to hear it read. I think of the workshop more as production development, because you're starting to bring other elements of the production in, you're starting to think about 'on the stage': the kind of stage, design elements, sound elements, lighting . . . . I see a difference between production development and script development--and I take the script to be the words on the page. I realize that I may be in a minority here. I've been to conferences and workshops where they talk about everyone being involved--the designers being involved in the development of the script, etcetera. I see no problem

in everyone being involved in the development of the *production*, but in terms of the script itself, it feels like that's the playwright's problem. I mean, the playwright doesn't come in and design the lights, or design the costumes--it's the designer's work.

JUDITH RUDAKOFF:

I don't have a set form for every workshop. I see where the play is, I see what the playwright's method is--because every playwright will work with a different method. Some people need actors to work--some people have to be able to hear it: they can't just work in a room with a VDT. Some other people don't seem to need voices. David French just doesn't need it: he has enough of an ear for his characters and he knows them intimately enough that he does hear them in his head and he doesn't need a workshop. But some people don't hear the flaws in their work until they actually *hear* actors saying it.

The most important thing in the workshop is to have somebody there as a dramaturge, not as a director. That's always of paramount importance to me. When I hear of people doing a workshop with their director, I always ask who it is, because there are just some people who, again, will see something in terms of what it's going to look like in the finished product, and they're not used to . . . . work in process. They're so busy being goal-oriented, and trying to get things to the point where they're production-ready, that they try to rush things, or they miss subtleties, or they miss the fork in the road that would have taken a different route. And, by rail-roading things towards end-product--either because there's a deadline coming up, or because that's just the way they think as a director--it harms the playwright and robs them of the play they intended to create. Some people are terrific at it--someone like Richard Rose is as much a dramaturge as he is a director, and he can switch back and forth between those two positions with great fluidity. Given the choice of a playwright and a director in workshop, or a playwright and a dramaturge in workshop, I'd pick the playwright and the dramaturge--and that's assuming that the dramaturge is someone with experience who knows what they're doing (because we all know that anybody who can spell it figures they can call themselves one).

Taking the play beyond the initial workshop phase certainly depends upon several factors--not the least of which is an organization's commitment to working with playwrights and workshopping plays, as well as producing these works. Companies like Toronto's Tarragon Theatre and Alberta Theatre Projects in Calgary have built into their organizations a vehicle for play and playwright development. The playwrights who take part in these programs are selected on the basis of the company's--and dramaturge's--commitment to them and their work. Those playwrights have an opportunity to go beyond the limitations of the brief workshop-

only process: they have the promise of seeing a script go through a long-term process of development. In the case of Tarragon's Playwrights' Unit, Artistic Director Urjo Kareda selects playwrights on the basis of their potential as writers. In the Unit, they begin work on an entirely new script, and spend their time writing and rewriting--rather than rushing into a production. By contrast, at Alberta Theatre Projects, plays already in progress are selected for development and production in the playRites Festival, with Bob White directing the process. However, regardless of whether or not the plays are produced at that time, the long-term development approach provides an immeasurable benefit in forging lasting relationships between playwrights, dramaturges and theatre companies.

URJO KAREDA

In this theatre, we don't have a dramaturge, because I'm the dramaturge--but I'm also the Artistic Director. It's a very lucky thing; I don't have to persuade anyone but myself to put the play on. In other theatres, that's the necessary connection. Even more important than the connection between the dramaturge and the playwright is the connection between the dramaturge and the artistic director. To be credible and effective, writers have to believe that the dramaturge can help get their play on, that the dramaturge will be the writer's champion in the theatre. Otherwise, you become just a librarian/receptionist.

[The work of the Playwrights' Unit is] quite different [from other play development programs], because those people come in without a script. The process of the Unit is to write a script over a period of a year. Those writers come into the Unit because they have written something previously, but then they write something new in the Unit. They are very much in the rhythm of creation: the Unit is very much about identifying your passion for your material, and also identifying its strengths--it becomes a workshop in rewriting as much as writing. It's very difficult for writers--particularly junior writers--to know what to keep; often, you have people who throw out everything and write something new that has all the same problems as the first one because they don't really know what was strong. So I think the Unit is a kind of workshop, but its focus is on building a play.

Several things can happen [when that process is over]. Hopefully, at the end of that year or whatever it is, they have a script which we may be interested in, or another theatre may be interested in. Something like *Scientific Americans*[1]--John Mighton's play--was developed in the Unit, but we didn't produce it; we had a week of readings and someone else came and wanted to do it. The playwright might have had the experience of writing a play from beginning to end, and realize that they want to work right away on something else. Or, in many cases, individuals come

out of the Unit and become playwrights-in-residence here. Or, we might actually produce the script that was developed in the Unit. Or, the person might find out they're not a playwright at all--which may be quite a painful decision, but also a valuable one to discover. The Unit isn't designed to generate scripts that we can produce. It's there to help people evolve as writers, and I'm much more interested in a long-term relationship with a writer than just a piece. For example, Joan MacLeod came to us in a manilla envelope [seven or eight] years ago, and didn't know if she was a writer. She went from being in the Playwrights' Unit to being playwright-in-residence, and we've produced all her work since then. It's that kind of relationship I'm interested in. As it turned out, her first piece, *Toronto, Mississippi*[2], went on to be successful here as well as lots of other places. But, that wouldn't have mattered to me; what was more interesting to me was that I thought she was a real writer, and I would have wanted to continue a relationship with her as long as it was mutually interesting.

[The Playwrights' Unit is] long-term, and it's very low-key, and it's very much out of the public eye. As its advantage, it gives a writer a peer group to work with, and a kind of structure to work within. I think one of its particular advantages is that it is within the context of a working theatre--at the same time as they're in the Unit, they're invited to other things going on at the theatre (other readings, etcetera) so that there is a continuum of play development all around them: there is the work that they are doing; there are four or five playwrights-in-residence who may well be brought into the Unit and to whom they have access all the time; they meet here at the theatre, where there are rehearsals going on at any given moment. They are *in a theatre*, they are in a very active centre.

[Developing an ongoing relationship with a playwright also] enables you to watch as someone grows and changes: you become much more sensitive to short-cuts they might be tempted to take, or when they're about to write themselves into a corner; as well, you're able to recognize when they have made a real breakthrough or done something they've never been able to do before. For instance, Judith Thompson: she would come in and say that for her next play she was really interested in just exploring plot--she said she'd never been able to do narrative or plot--and I was able to discuss a body of work with her. You are able to see the ways in which they get better and evolve. And, you also know them on a much more intimate and personal level, so you know where they're vulnerable, and what's going to be difficult for them to achieve: you know--and this is sometimes painful--when something is not going to happen in the writing unless something happens in the life, and there's nothing you can do at that point.

Any kind of long-term comm tment you are able to make to playwrights will, I think, pay off. It's hard, because you have to carve out that time, and there's no money for it. But it's a commitment of time and the resources of a theatre that I think they value, and the kind of access they can have to the profession.

BOB WHITE

What we're doing here [Alberta Theatre Projects] is investing the time and effort in shows that we want to produce. So, you make the commitment to do the workshop activity on a play, but you've already said to the playwright, We're going into rehearsal on December 4th, and it's going to open January 28th. I find that the quality of response from the playwright, and the quality of work from all involved is better. For example, we're able here now, sometimes--when we're doing a workshop in the fall on one of the scripts that's going into playRites festival--to have three or four of the actors who are going to be in that show go into rehearsal. You just find the whole level of, Oh, I guess I'd better pay attention here, because in two months I'm going to be out there trying to sell this stuff . . .

. . . One of the things I like about the festival [is that] we've been given Carte Blanche, and we can do whatever we want with it . . . The show gets anywhere between eight and twelve performances in the festival, so it is a smaller scale; and the risk is minimalized for us because we've got three other shows on at the same time. And yet, the playwright gets *a full production*: actors learn the lines, they get costumes, they get a set, the whole bit . . . Not a staged reading, but a real theatre experience where no apologies are made.

There are those who will argue against that, and say that playRites is, in fact, a ghetto: that if we really believed in new work, they'd be appearing on our main stage all the time . . . And that's possible. But, with the realities of a 3.5 million dollar operation, if you want us to be here next year, in this city, with this audience . . . it dictates this.

[Having playwrights come back through several years of playRites is a] process that we work through: . . . a show that's given a Platform reading in one festival gives us an opportunity to assess the play and the playwright in front of a small audience. And yes, it is a staged reading. So a play that seems to have a dynamic, and seems to be working very well in the Platform Plays situation, well, then I say let's address its potential . . . . we've seen what it was like in front of folks, and now we'll move it into a workshop, and then move it into production in the fall. It extends the process. It buys the writer time. I think that was one of the failings in the earlier days: we rushed a lot of stuff out onto the stage just out of sheer need for product. Now, we have the luxury of time--and, it's not as luxurious as it could be--of being more patient with the play, and being more sure about it before we actually do it.

And so, the more experience you have as a writer in the theatre--sitting in audiences, watching your work being done--the better you're going to get at it. Some young writers come having really good instincts for it right away (like with Judith Thompson--it's in her bones!); others have to learn it. But that kind of experience . . . you either develop through an awful lot of having been through things, or you never get it. I have run into writers who can still literally sit in the audience and have no idea of how the audience is responding; and then there's these people who just climb into

> these things: *that's the difference*. And I get off on those kinds of writers, where they are for the moment--who are not fighting the bad things about it, and who are going, Oh man, we've got to change that--who are attuned to the theatrical moment. Then it's exciting, because they aren't fighting it: it's obvious the scene is three minutes too long . . . so, okay, I'll just have to rewrite it . . .
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> In the situation of the festival, for example, we have to say, What did we learn from the previews of the show, and how our audience is responding, and then, How do we make this play the best play it can be? That's serving the play. And there are times--and this is what I've been talking about--when in fact the playwright isn't plugged into what the experience is all about: what is happening between the audience and what is happening on stage. And I think you are wrong to just bend over backwards and do whatever the playwright wants, because in some cases they're so caught up--especially the younger ones--in the experience of the moment that they have no idea what's going on. Therefore, you have to be kind of strict and say, This is what the play is all about . . .
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> I think what is happening--at least because there are less opportunities for workshops now--is that kind of 'Let's do a workshop' stuff seems to be fading away, thank God! I may be wrong; I mean, it's difficult for me to assess what's happening right across the country from here . . . . It seems to me you've got to invest yourself: you've got to make the commitment to the writer and to that play, and see it all the way through to production if you can. I think that's much more helpful.

While Tarragon's Playwrights' Unit and ATP's playRites Festival are somewhat separate entities within their respective companies, the work and the relationships with playwrights they develop do influence the theatre as a whole, and, perhaps, the kinds of plays they produce in the long run. But having a separate branch of the theatre for development is only one way in which producing organizations are involved in the process.

Many producing theatre companies across Canada are involved in some way with new play development. During his tenure as Artistic Director at Winnipeg's Prairie Theatre Exchange, Kim McCaw, committed to developing and producing new plays, hired Per Brask as a consultant dramaturge for the company. Having a dramaturge associated with the theatre was the extra ingredient PTE needed to make new plays a successful focus. Because Per Brask was experienced in the field, the company was able to bring writers--

even those who had never written for the stage before--along in a process that culminated in production of their work.

PER BRASK:

[I think that] where your test as a dramaturge finally is is in a production situation. So working for PTE was a very good time, because every single project we worked on saw the stage. They were all new plays, and some of them were written by people who had never written for the stage before (at that time, people like Patrick Friessen had never written for the stage, Sandra Birdsell, David Arneson). They were *fantastic* writers, and that was probably the most exciting dramaturgical venture that I have ever been involved with.

It's a matter of developing the vocabulary--and in some cases it takes longer than in others. In the three cases that I just mentioned, it was very fast. Basically, after discussing over a lunch the differences between what's needed on the page for a play, and what's needed on the page for a story, and one's notions of dramatic actions were clarified, and what it is one works with--what the building blocks are, what rhetorical strategies are possible to use, and how to translate them into something called action--once that was clear, then it was fairly simple for those people to go away and start to worry about that. And, in each case we would go through several drafts, of course. But we would also go through a situation where they had contact with actors, and we would have a round-table sort of read-through to discuss it. So, that all worked very well.

But what was good about that situation as opposed to many other situations was that, as a dramaturge, you were involved from that very first instance until the moment that that play was on stage the following year. I think it's the most interesting way to work, but I don't think it's essential. However, it really is gratifying for all parties involved. Because, in a situation like that, you have to go through the whole training situation, then into the writing situation, and then into the production situation.

It was a unique situation, ... and it was simply the circumstance that Kim McCaw--who was Artistic Director--had made a profound commitment to wanting to tell stories that originated from here [Manitoba]. That was new . . . . In addition to that, what he wanted was to engage writers who hadn't written for the stage before. So he picked the writers that he responded particularly well to when he read their stories--three of whom I just mentioned. In those three years (1984-87) everything that Kim commissioned ended up on the stage. It's very simple why it happened: it happened because there was an Artistic Director--Kim McCaw--who had a complete and utter commitment to make sure that it happened.

KIM MCCAW:

I formed an understanding of what I understood the kind of goal/mission the company had set for itself, the kind of role the company wanted to play in the community; I determined what that was through conversations with people over there and other people in the community. And, I realized this is what people want the company to be, this is what the company wants to be--and I'd like to play a role in that too.

Now--what are we going to do to try and achieve that? I went through the process of trying to determine what shows and what programs were needed in order to accomplish that goal. It was sort of an interesting problem, [ten or eleven] years ago, having a goal of being a centre for play development and production in Manitoba. The problem was, there wasn't very much play*writing* happening primarily because there hadn't been a centre for development of that profession, so why would someone be a playwright in Manitoba ten years ago? Why--they weren't going to get their plays done--why would it ever even occur to some people to be a playwright, since they never saw any Manitoba plays? And, that happened all over the country . . . .

So, one of the jobs was to develop playwriting activity. The second was to become successful with some of the plays! In some ways, you get lucky with that, but then again, in some ways, you actually can affect that. Specifically, in PTE's case, I think the single most important thing in those first couple of years was finding Wendy Lill. It's as simple as that. She wrote a wonderful play that we put on, and the city kind of went, I get it! You want to do plays like *that*! That's great! We could use that. We had a few years there that were just heaven; it was a very exciting time.

Occasionally, a producing theatre company may have a dramaturge on staff who is not necessarily involved in developing scripts for immediate production. As dramaturge with the Toronto Free Theatre (later Canadian Stage Company) in Toronto, Judith Rudakoff organized readings and workshops and provided one-on-one support for playwrights. In doing so, she provided playwrights--often with little or no experience in the theatre--with an environment where they could practice and develop their craft.

JUDITH RUDAKOFF:

I was called Literary Manager; for one year I was called Dramaturge. I was working with an Artistic Director who had a very strong sense of dramaturgy himself (and really preferred to do everything himself). There were so many other things that I had to do that I didn't get a lot of time in rehearsal hall, or with some of the playwrights. But, instead of getting frustrated I found other avenues to dramaturgy.

. . . . Just to give you a few examples . . . I started to set up and coordinate a reading series and a workshop series for very new playwrights. Originally, it was called "In The Works" and it later grew--when the theatre became The Canadian Stage, with funding and extra personnel--into something called "PlayGround". What I did was work with playwrights who had not been produced yet, developing the work and developing their sense of playwriting. Sometimes I had actors to work with--professional actors--but, more often than not, I drew upon people I knew, or students that I had worked with (first at Humber College, and then through York). We usually met for two or three three-hour sessions with each playwright, where we'd read their work for them. It was really a neophyte program, with neophyte playwrights and neophyte actors: working with playwrights who had never before heard their work; getting the actors used to working with a new playwright and a new play--and what that meant--and training them to work in workshop situations. It was really quite important and quite exciting.

At other times a playwright would come in, and they would just want one-on-one contact. The theatre couldn't afford to give them any kind of ongoing financial support. All the writers really wanted was somebody to read their play and give them an hour's time; all they wanted to know was if they should bother continuing. I had a lot of cups of coffee with a lot of playwrights in a lot of dark, dingy restaurants. And that sort of support, I think, is at least as valuable as supporting the playwrights who know that they can succeed and who need one-on-one work in the rehearsal hall.

Of course, there are producing companies that are very committed to play development and yet do not have a dramaturge on staff. The primary focus of Vancouver's New Play Centre, under Pamela Hawthorn's direction, was the production of new Canadian plays. And, the choice to pair playwrights with *directors*--who would be able to see the work through all stages of development up to and including production--was a conscious one, with the view that the dramaturgical input would be enriched by someone with directorial skills.

PAMELA HAWTHORN:

One of the underlying tenets or philosophies of the New Play Centre--and I don't know if it was actually ever stated anywhere--was that primarily the people that we put together with writers were directors. They called themselves directors, they thought of themselves as directors, and indeed that was their primary function in the theatre. The understanding was that although certainly not every script that we worked on was finally going to get into the theatre--it simply didn't--nonetheless that was the basis upon which we worked. The whole idea was that what you were doing here was trying to get a script ready to go into a production for an audience. And, in our

situation, many, many times the same director would stay with the script through the whole process: they would be the first person who would . . . get involved with it at the New Play Centre, and ultimately, if the script was produced, they would end up being the director of that script.

Now, that wasn't always true . . . . We tried--to the best of our ability--to find personalities at any given time we felt might be able to assist the situation. So we would often change, but at the same time, we would often stay with the same person right through. But I think the underlying understanding was that that person--whoever it was--was a director capable of taking that script into a theatre, into a rehearsal hall, putting it on its feet, and getting it ready for an audience. That was a very basic thing that went on at the New Play Centre.

I do [think that there is a particular kind of focus for a director working in a development situation]. I think that you're in a completely different mind-set. And there are some directors--who are very good directors--who in my opinion are not very good at working with new plays.

The New Play Centre, from the day of its inception, tread this very narrow, dangerous line between being loved because it did only developmental work, to being hated because it didn't do productions, or vice versa. And, in the years that I ran the company, I continually tried--like a fulcrum--to keep balancing those two sides of the company, so that in the end, over a long period of time, the company would seem to have survived in both areas relatively well.

Now, there were periods in our history--not many, but a few years scattered about--where we might have produced maybe one thing during the year. Usually--on average--I think you'd find that we had about three production slots a year. But sometimes it was less than that, and a few times it was more than that. I can remember one or two years where I think we did five or six productions.

But it was always--from my perspective--an effort and an attempt to balance the company between these two roles; which, of course, meant balancing the income, balancing the finances. Because, if you were going to have a heavy production year--well, it's obvious what I'm going to say--you had very little money left over for development. So, that often would mean that the following year you would try to re-balance in the other direction, putting many more resources into development, and less into production. I always felt in the years I ran the company that this was fundamental to the well-being of the company: it *should* provide both roles for the Canadian playwright, and indeed for the audiences of Vancouver. I think that over the eighteen years that I ran the company we were relatively successful at doing that. During the primary years that I was there--from 1972 to 1986, let's say, although I was there a little longer than that--I think we managed relatively successfully to balance those two needs. Some people see them as conflicting needs; I never saw them as such. I always saw production as the final outcome of the development process. What is the point [of workshopping a play if it doesn't go any further than that]? And lots of

> playwrights--and you can hear them, and they'll quote it in public, etcetera, etcetera--say, Oh, what we need are workshop organizations; what we're interested in is the development of the play. Well, I believe them at the moment when they say it, but fundamentally what that playwright wants is his play produced in the theatre. And, that for me has always been the bottom line.

Despite their important contribution to play development in Canada, producing theatre companies are often limited in the support they can offer to playwrights. Because their focus is on producing a season of plays, there are certain financial and personnel constraints on their development activity; the number of playwrights they work with may be limited. Beyond these factors, working within the structures of a producing company brings its own set of demands on the playwright's ability to produce. For example, a work can be rushed into production before it is ready, before the playwright has had a chance to fully explore the play's range of theatrical possibilities. And, ultimately, a producing company may not always be prepared to put time and effort into a work that is 'experimental' or 'cutting-edge'--ie. not commercial. It is here, then, that non-producing play development organizations have a significant role to play.

Playwrights' Workshop Montreal has played an integral role in the development of the Canadian play and playwright for almost thirty years. Its role is of particular interest here in that three of the individuals interviewed held the position of Artistic Director at PWM at some point during their careers (Bob White from 1975 to 1978, Per Brask from 1978 to 1981, and Svetlana Zylin from 1988 to 1991). Over the years, PWM has developed various ways of working with playwrights, including one-on-one sessions with dramaturges, readings and workshops--both with and without an audience--as well as continued support to playwrights whose work is being produced. The emphasis for PWM, unlike the producing company, is on the playwriting process, and the commitment to developing an ongoing relationship with the playwright.[3]

SVETLANA ZYLIN:

> . . . . Except for a very brief period of time that ended up being financially disastrous--PWM has maintained a firm non-producing mandate. There was a debate at a certain point whether there was a need for or usefulness in development outside of production. I think there is a tendency in some quarters to perceive a development organization as existing to workshop for workshopping's sake;

removed from the higher profile of a producing theatre, it doesn't get the kind of recognition that it deserves. Because our work is so much behind the scenes, and because we work with many playwrights at such early stages of the development, by the time the play gets produced we usually get a simple acknowledgement in the program of that production--and the scope of the work that we've done is rarely addressed or catalogued.

BOB WHITE:

Playwrights' Workshop has more of a national mandate than it did when I was there . . . . Playwrights' Workshop . . . when I went in there in 1975 . . . was eight writers in Montreal whom no one would dare produce because their work was so bad. They expected me to just somehow save them--because I had all of this two years' experience in Toronto--and make their works famous as whoever . . . And then, of course, I started bringing in playwrights from Toronto, and nearly got fired! But that's another story . . .

But it's a tricky one, because it's very easy to discount places like Playwrights' Workshop Montreal, because you go, Well, what's happening with the work there, where's it going . . . God knows that over the years, the work that has evolved there has evolved in a very interesting way. But the concept of the free-standing play development centre has always been kind of difficult for me. I've always thought that maybe it's too divorced from 'the real theatre community,' and that whole process whereby you know that you're going on to production--you're not just sitting around in the bar commiserating with other playwrights who've had a workshop or 'a dramaturgical session' with someone. Where does this lead to? I think as long as those organizations maintain really good links with producing theatres in some way--that they're always, in fact, bringing folks in who are involved and who are interested in literally picking up the work and moving it on--they'll be okay.

SVETLANA ZYLIN:

What we do is acknowledge that any play needs at least two years to develop properly, and that any writer will need some kind of long-term commitment from an organization. So no, I don't believe that we workshop for workshop's sake here. I believe that our first and foremost commitment is to playwrights of worth, whether they be burgeoning or established; and, once we make a commitment to that playwright, we try and facilitate or get involved in as many services or in providing as many resources as that playwright needs. There is an ongoing commitment to following through with playwrights, even when they are involved with other organizations: for example, with Maureen Hunter, even though she has undertaken to work on a commission with the Manitoba Theatre Centre--her newest play is going to be workshopped there--we continue to correspond with her and give her dramaturgical advice, and we have cooperated with the Manitoba

Theatre Centre to do 'Co-Works,' where we can get involved with the Manitoba Theatre Centre to assure the playwright of that kind of ongoing consistent dramaturgical advice. We're very concerned that a play that might end up in three or four different development centres can, in fact, get three or four different kinds of input that may not necessarily be fruitful to the playwright. Even though we may all be talking about the same thing, because possibly different terminology or different languages apply to the input, it may seem to be--and in some cases, has been--contradictory advice.

The idea is that the core relationship within this organization is between the dramaturge and the playwright. We assign a dramaturge to the playwright, and it is--as much as possible--a mutually agreeable situation. Then what happens is that through the long-term the trust is established, a mutual language is learned, and people can then facilitate the work more expediently and more effectively. And, what happens also is that after three years with certain playwrights, you get to know who they are and what they're writing, and why they're writing what they're writing; it's just more effective to deal with a writer over the long term. Obviously in certain situations no one dramaturge can provide for all the needs of any playwright: for example, you can't expect a developmental dramaturge to necessarily also be a good production dramaturge. So, in certain instances, we will assign another dramaturge to a playwright for a specific period of time, but that's with the understanding that that dramaturge will have the benefit of all the input of all the work that's already been done with that playwright.

PER BRASK:

The work at Playwrights' Workshop, and that free-standing play development thing, is a lovely situation to work in. It's also phenomenally frustrating, because you don't know that the play is going to go anywhere. The aim is the play; the aim is not eventual performance . . . although I find that situation to be lovely in terms of your basic R & D, and a good place for everyone to develop their muscle tissue . . .

I don't think that I changed much [during my] time [there]. We were operating very much within the structure that Bob had set up: intensive one-week workshops with a variety of people . . . . I think we probably made more linkages across the country with people. We also made linkages with the U.S. at that time: we set up an exchange between the Playwrights' Unit at the Actors' Studio and ourselves . . . .

SVETLANA ZYLIN:

Because the anglophone theatre community here is so isolated from the rest of Canada and is so limited in its resources, and because there is only the one regional theatre here--and it tends to

produce local playwrights in a very specific and limited way--we have a strong sense of responsibility to fulfilling the needs of the local playwriting community. And, we look for ways and means of supporting that community, not only to insure that the established playwrights get access to our services, but to also build programs--like the 'Write in Montreal' program--that address the needs of the local burgeoning playwrights.

[Beyond our work here,] we've had a number of conversations with people like the Manitoba Association of Playwrights, and now there's an Atlantic Playwrights' Resource Centre opening up. We've talked for at least three years about the possibility of having a federation of playwrights' associations happening in this country, and we're constantly seeking new ways of inaugurating cooperative ventures--primarily, of course, because all of us need to stretch our funding dollars further, and also because there is a real concern on my part not to 'double-up' activities, and not to repeat ourselves with certain playwrights. The discussion is ongoing, but as long as we remain so limited with funding and staffing resources, quite frankly, at the moment, it's difficult to just keep up with the workload that we have. We're having difficulty simply maintaining our mandate. And, as far as any further outreach programs are concerned, what we can do is what we did with the Atlantic provinces: we set up a program called 'Looking East;' we secured funding for a six-month period from the ministère des affaires culturelles for that; and now, I'm happy to say, we have a community in the Atlantic provinces that is receiving funding to set up their own resource centre there. So, again, it is that kind of grass-roots work that Playwrights' Workshop Montreal does to promote and enhance development activities within the regions. In the longer sense, perhaps, it won't gain us any further profile, because it is so hidden or behind the scenes. But, it is all towards the cause of our mandate, which is to promote and disseminate new play development activities throughout Canada.

I think the more playwrights from the national spectrum work with us, the more we are becoming known and recognized (as those playwrights get produced more often). Yes, I think there is still a certain marginalization that happens. We've been working really hard in the last three years to combat that perception, and I think to a certain extent we've succeeded in that by pursuing exchanges with other organizations like the New Play Centre and the Manitoba Association of Playwrights, and also by my making our work and our dramaturgy more visible in other centres of Canada. For example, we've just undertaken an initiative with Theatre New Brunswick. For the second year now, we've been doing a project that we've titled 'Entre Deux,' where we send a playwright and a dramaturge from our roster to assist the Artistic Director of Theatre New Brunswick in promoting and developing regional voices.

. . . Field dramaturgy was something I initiated, primarily to address the need for qualified dramaturges to be available to regions and playwrights that may not have access to them, and to promote the importance of dramaturgy to the play development process outside of production. Also, for us, it has been a cost-effective way of providing dramaturgy and resources to playwrights who do not live in Montreal. Quite often, it is more cost-effective--obviously--to send me, for

example, to Whitehorse for ten days to work with Nakai and the playwriting community there, than to figure out the ways and means to bring those three or four playwrights to Montreal to work with us. It also allows us some sense of longer term development: for example, one of the playwrights that we worked with in Fredericton is now into his second year of development with Playwrights' Workshop Montreal, and that has been facilitated not only by bringing him here for intensive workshopping activity, but also by sending a dramaturge from here to Fredericton to work with him on his works in progress.

. . . . We've also got involved in training bilingual dramaturges-- understanding that translation dramaturgy is also a very specific skill--which, as far as I know, no one else is practising . . . . We really consolidated our visibility within the francophone community with our retrospective called 'Intimate Universe,' where we gathered a number of young francophone playwrights together and did readings of their work in French and in translation. I think that added a lot to our credibility; they recognized that our very strong desire--located within the Montreal community--is to provide that cross-cultural exchange.

We're working with people here who are developing the specific skills required to work on translation projects. As a dramaturge on a new work by the original writer, you can discuss the structure, or the dialogue, or discuss character intentions from the point of view of possible change. When you're working in translation, there's a whole other set of considerations that have to be applied. When you're a dramaturge, what you're looking at in a translation is to make sure that the language into which the play has been translated conforms to the original intentions. So, you're not mucking with the play itself; you're realizing a different vision of it that's true to the original intent--in a different language. There is another person: the translator and the dramaturge are separate. But the dramaturge is fully bilingual, sometimes is a translator or a director in both languages as well, and is fully capable of not only reading the original language but adept and well-versed enough in the second language to be able to facilitate the kind of discussion required to make sure that the translation serves the original work.

I came to my interest in translation quite early because Russian is my maternal tongue. When I was teaching at Langara (Vancouver Community College, Langara Campus) I was directing student productions, and they wanted me to do *Three Sisters*. Because I couldn't find a decent translation, I ended up doing my own. And, I've worked as a consultant on a number of other projects--Russian translations--where, if you don't have an understanding of the milieu, it's sometimes difficult; a literal translation will sometimes not serve the intention of the playwright because it will miss the point of the context. So, you have to be able to know what you can change. For example, things that we commonly consider to be cliches or truisms as they exist in one language will have no meaning in another. Again, that's what the translation dramaturge does here at PWM: look at the literal translation, go back to the original, and then find ways of facilitating in order for the translator to grasp the context of the milieu of the new language.

> [In 1990] we got a grant from Theatre Ontario to bring a young francophone Albertan into our fold. What we did here was have him work on language workshops; we also had a cooperative with the centre des auteurs where he spent a fair bit of time with Maureen Labonté, Hélène Dumas, and Linda Gaboriau, and got to meet their playwrights and talk to them; and he went to a lot of French productions. And we assigned him, as part of his training process, to do translation work from English to French and from French to English under the supervision of senior translators--although he has no plans to be a translator--in order for him to gain a better understanding of the intricacies involved in translating work.
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> But it's also important that the English writers be integrated into the French market--and that's starting to happen now. Because the perception was for a long time--and we have, unfortunately, fostered it--that with this love affair that we've had with Quebec playwriting over the last few years, we've denied that our work--though more text-based in many instances--is as valid and as interesting as the work that's done here. But now we're starting to see inroads being made, with Judith Thompson having had a production here, and Brad Fraser: work is now being seen in the Quebecois milieu that was originally written in English by Canadians from outside Quebec.
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> . . . My view of the importance of an organization such as PWM [is that] the development gets done--the major development of the work gets done--outside of the producing body. So that when a producing body commits to that work, their job is to rehearse it, provide production dramaturgy, and get it on to the best of their abilities.

While Playwrights' Workshop Montreal works with playwrights year-round, the Banff Playwrights' Colony works only in the summer. Founded by Tom Hendry in 1974, the Banff Colony began as a place where playwrights could go and practice their craft without the pressures of production, and in a setting that took them away from the pressures of their everyday lives. The Colony provided playwrights at various stages in the writing process with what they needed, whether simply time to write and talk occasionally with a dramaturge, or access to actors to hear their play read.[4]

Over the years, the Colony's approach has been refined. John Murrell, Head of the Banff Playwrights' Colony from 1986 to 1989, credited "Sharon Pollock [Head of the Colony from 1977 to 1979] and Fran Gebhard [Head of the Colony from 1980 to 1985] [with significant contributions] to the expansion of the Colony; Sharon particularly, in her insistence on the quality of the scripts and intensity of script work in Banff . . . . and Fran, in her fostering of a maximum variety of stimulus available to all participants in the

Colony."[5] Feeling that other play development organizations were better equipped to deal with the early stages of the writing process, Murrell chose to turn the Colony's attention to plays that were nearing completion, "in that final, intense revising and polishing and fine tuning phase which ideally precedes rehearsal and production."[6] And, with the arrival of Kim McCaw in 1990, the Banff Playwrights' Colony continued to provide a nurturing and supportive environment for playwrights.

KIM MCCAW:

. . . . Let me describe a little bit of the process that I go through in terms of putting together the Colony program for each year . . . In the early fall, we put out a brochure/promotional piece that's also an application that's available for playwrights. We send it around the country: to any playwriting organizations we know of, writers' guilds, universities, theatre companies. I usually write a letter to my colleagues--because I was an artistic director as well--saying, If you have writers that you are currently working with, please make this available to them . . . . I've also done promotional trips around the country.

What happens is I guess I spend about a week in promotional stuff--talking and travelling. And I also will spend about another week where I write my application for Canada Council: my description of my plan for the coming year. And that always happens in the fall (October or November). And then I don't do anything as such on the program until February, when the scripts start coming in. And then February is dedicated to reading the scripts, contacting the writers, contacting dramaturges, putting the schedule together and hiring the acting company. And that's basically done by mid-March. Then I don't have to do that much until I get here.

Writers are then encouraged to apply, and to submit scripts which they wish to bring here to work on. I get about eighty applications per year . . . . And there's a tremendous range of experience of writers, and a tremendous range of state-of-readiness among those plays. In some cases . . . playwrights were coming with not even completed drafts; in other cases, they were working on plays that they've been working on for forty years. So what I try and do as I go through all of the applications is evaluate which ones--from looking at the specific project and at my knowledge of the particular writer, and trying to find out whether those combinations and the kind of work and resources we can provide here will be of most use to those people. So I narrow that list down. At that point I contact the writers directly: I ask them to tell me more about where they are with the particular play, exactly what it is that they want. And, from that, I narrow it down to the group of people that I think I can invite.

I've got a budget amount that I can work with, in terms of total weeks for playwrights and total weeks for dramaturges. Then I start asking how much time they need--two weeks, three weeks?

Is there a particular person that they want to work with? In some cases, for example, a play may be scheduled for production by a particular theatre, and they're really looking to fine-tune the play; in that case, there may be a director already assigned, so the writer will say, So-and-so is directing the play in February--it would be great if we could have three weeks together. In other cases, they just say, Well, you tell me--is there a dramaturge that you'd like me to work with? So, eventually I work out pairings.

What I did with the three writers that were here the first couple of weeks [in 1991] (Greg Nelson, Sandy Senko and David Demchuk) was spend time with them myself; I told them, You can come--I can't get you a personal dramaturge, but I will be available to you in that case. And, in a couple of other cases, people came in without anyone in particular, so it became my responsibility, or Paula Dankert's (who [was] my associate [that] year); we became floating dramaturges in that sense.

I brought [Paula] in . . . so she--like me--became involved in all of it . . . [When] John [Murrell] knew that he was going to leave, . . . he . . . [spoke] to me about the possibility of taking over from him. At that point, I'd never been here before, so I said, Maybe what we should do is work together once, and I'll find out what Banff really is about, and you'll find out more about me, and we can figure out whether we all think this is the right idea. The reason I brought Paula in . . . is that . . . I felt a little bit isolated in the reading sessions, and I didn't have the opportunity to meet with individual writers in a more flexible way. So, I wanted to have her here so that we had the option of who would sit in on the readings, and who would do all that other stuff. And I think that flexibility is the right thing.

There aren't many people who are trained in that area. Paula is actually unusual in the country in that she has, over the last few years, devoted herself fairly specifically to dramaturgical development. She was at the National Theatre School in the directing program; she worked at the New Play Centre for one or two seasons with Pam Hawthorn; she then was an associate at Playwrights Workshop with Svetlana Zylin; and, in the past couple of years has essentially freelanced--a lot of work in Atlantic Canada in particular--doing dramaturgy . . . . I did want somebody with a different background as well; I'm primarily a director.

In many cases here--in the majority of cases here--the writer is working with a particular dramaturge. In that case, I try to take a secondary role. Virtually in every case there is a working relationship between those two people: they've already been at work on this play to a large extent; a kind of dialogue has been developed and a process is under way--whatever the nature of each of them is. I try not to impose a different kind of approach to things on that, but rather I try to sit back, and then say (at whatever point), Would you like to hear what I think? And in some cases, they really don't, to be honest--not in a negative way, it's just that they don't really need it. So then it becomes really important to just keep your mouth shut, because there's only so many things a writer needs to hear at any given time. For a lot of years we had workshops that just kind

of became free-for-alls, and that can be very counter-productive, and, I think, terribly destructive--although not intentionally so. The poor writer will throw his play out on the table and everybody will pounce on it, and tell them how to write this thing; it's just awful. I like to try and keep a little more positive kind of atmosphere, and let each session be dictated by the particular dramaturge.

I think that . . . probably the single most valuable aspect that we can offer here [is that] there is no production. There is no more pressure than the pressure you put on yourself as an artist. In some cases, these writers have productions coming up--so there is that. But, at the same time, while they're here, they don't have to go into rehearsal, they don't have to have a show . . . .

The [process] I've described is basically borrowed from John Murrell and his approach to things. The way he stated it--and I think it's really nice and simple--is [that] he starts from the point of view that a writer . . . . [knows] what their play needs more than anybody. So that's what I try and do with these people; to say, What do you want? Do you want to sit in your room and write for three weeks, and have your meals looked after for you, and you don't even have to make the bed, and you don't have to worry about a job for three weeks, family, or the people that bug you--or whatever it is . . . There's a million obstacles in the way of writer. For a few weeks, we can take quite a few of those obstacles out of the way for them. If that's what you want, that's fine; you don't even have to talk to me if you don't want to. But if you want to talk to me, I'm here; I'll read it anytime you want, if you want some feedback; you've got an acting company to read the play for you so you can hear it--we'll act the scene out for you if that's what you want. We'll improvise it; we'll stand on our heads *if that's what you want*. If you want a person to work with, I'll try and get them for you. So, for a couple of weeks, we try and give them what they ask for.

What I learned from talking to writers is that the thing they most want is the opportunity to have time with actors. That's the hardest thing for them to get. A writer can usually find someone who will read their play, and will talk to them about it. But, it's very hard for them to find enough actors to make their play sound right. So, whenever I ask them when they want to come, and I say that the acting company is going to be here during these weeks, they say, I want to come then. Or most of them do. So we spent time . . . trying to figure out a way that we can expand the time we have with actors. And I think we've come up with a way to do that . . . .

[In 1991] the largest number [of writers] we had at one point was seven. We had three in the first week, five in the second, six for the third week, six for the fourth week, seven for the fifth week and five in the final week. They did kind of roll through in waves. In most of the cases what would happen is the writers would arrive and one of the first things they wanted was to hear their play. Then, they could go away for a few days and know what they wanted to do . . . .

Beyond the specific work program of their play, there is also that undefinable element where you can have a writer from Vancouver spending time getting to know a writer from Quebec. The two

of them have possibly never heard of each other before; or, they may have heard of each other, but never seen each other. That sort of unplanned relationship I think is also valuable.

We did actually have a couple of [more formal discussion sessions]. We did one [in 1990] that I set up as a forum. We had about four or five director/dramaturges with us, and just prior to them arriving, I decided I'd like to have one evening with some kind of focused conversation about something. And, since the dramaturges essentially have the lightest workload of anybody here, I asked them to prepare about two or three minutes of a response to the following question, as a place to start the discussion: "It is May, 1994; what are you most looking forward to in the upcoming theatre season?" And it allowed them chances to talk about what kind of future they were seeing for the theatre in this country. So, each of them spoke for a few minutes about their answer to that question. And then, the rest of the evening was everybody else talking--and it was a really enjoyable evening.

[The following year], at one point, one of the writers here--Debbie Bailey (she's from Alaska, and she is the producing director of Perseverance Theatre there)--set up that sort of discussion. [Her company has] a different operational structure than most of the Canadian theatres do; it's a little more of a cooperative, consensual model--less hierarchical. So, she offered to spend an evening--start an evening--talking about that structure. Then, from that, a conversation developed amongst us all about the nature of theatre structure. And that was interesting.

I'm hesitant to try and impose formal sessions because part of the strength of this place is that there really isn't any structure as such. Basically, it's If you want to come up here and write, write--and I'll leave you alone. And, it is a flexible structure: a writer can come in and say, I think I'm going to have a new first act to be read; when can I get it done? And we can respond, rather than say, I'm sorry, we can't do it because we have a seminar set up. That's what I want to guard against. On the other hand, I don't want to miss the opportunity.

I wrestle with it, trying to figure out how to balance the two. That was my response when I was first here, as John's associate: there are all these interesting people, and I got a chance to talk to a lot of them, but I wanted more focus to it. So I kind of focused things a bit more in 1990. And then [in 1991] my instinct told me just to back off a little bit . . . it has to evolve.

There are lots of companies that *are* doing outstanding development work: they have relationships with particular writers, for example, where they really get a complete kind of situation. And they don't need this place--and that's fine. However, the kind of mixture that exists at Banff--on the one hand, a retreat, an escape from distraction, pressure, whatever, and at the same time, an opportunity to have a concentrated period of work and interaction with other people--can be very nourishing for a writer.

There are indeed a wide variety of approaches to new play development. Whether it is a freelance

dramaturge, a producing company, or a non-producing play development organization, someone from among the network of people and places that exist to support the Canadian playwright is doing substantial dramaturgical work.

Thus one of the central functions of the Canadian dramaturge in new play development is, indeed, creating situations where playwrights can write. And, there are two sorts of roles involved here: one is, of course, the hands-on work that has just been discussed; the other, however, is the evolution of the kinds of situations where that hands-on work can occur. (For example, setting up and managing organizations like the Banff Colony or Playwrights' Workshop Montreal, or programs such as the Playwrights' Unit at Tarragon Theatre.)

In this way, the dramaturge's role moves beyond the one-on-one session with a playwright, or the workshop, or the rehearsal hall. Perhaps the most important place the dramaturge can be is at the forefront of the drive to create and sustain opportunities for Canadian playwrights. That work involves, in part, having an understanding of the development work that is happening at present, as well as a vision for the future and what it holds in store for the theatre and the playwright in this country.

Notes

1. John Mighton, *Scientific Americans*, dir. Greg Johnson, Home for Contemporary Theatre, New York City, October, 1988 [premiere].

2. Joan MacLeod, *Toronto, Mississippi*, dir. Andy McKim, Tarragon Theatre, Toronto, October 6, 1987 [premiere].

3. Playwrights' Workshop Montreal, *A Short History*. [to 1990]

4. Brian Brennan, "The Banff Playwrights Colony: Finishing School," *Canadian Theatre Review*, No. 49 (Winter 1986), pp. 30-5.

5. John Murrell, "Banff Head Sets New Colony Direction," *CanPlay*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (April 1986), p. 4.

6. Ibid., p. 5.

CHAPTER THREE: Researching the Social Senses: Dramaturgy, Play Development and Audience

In May, 1987, Canada's first Directors' Colloquium took place in Calgary, an "attempt to engage directors in a comprehensive examination of the technical and theoretical issues involved in their art."[1] Through a series of workshops and panel discussions, participants and observers explored the directing process. (Partial transcripts of the event were published that same year in *Canadian Theatre Review*[2].) Joanne Conian wrote of the Colloquium: "Directing is a young profession for which a definition is only still emerging. This colloquium went a long way to making it clear . . . . an unstated definition of directing emerged that is practical yet has creative implications."[3]

Such a gathering serves to illustrate a point about the evolution of the Canadian theatre. While directing may be a "young profession," there are enough individuals who are practising that art--and being recognized for it--to warrant a forum for an exchange of ideas. Because most theatre practitioners are often so busy with their own work that they cannot take the time to see what their colleagues are doing, such a forum is surely a welcome opportunity, and one that must be in some way beneficial to the participants and to the profession as a whole. And such forums are not unique to the conference format, or to directors. There are many other avenues through which theatre professionals seek each other out: associations such as PACT (Professional Association of Canadian Theatres) and unions such as Playwrights' Union of Canada and Actors' Equity, to name a few, offer opportunities for sharing information and ideas.

Dramaturgy is an even younger profession in this country. What has emerged from these interviews is not unlike the observations made in 1987 at the Directors' Colloquium; there are many common concerns about the current ways of working, and also about the possibilities that exist in the future.

The previous chapters examined some of the theories and practices of theatre professionals working in the

area of new play development. But what also surfaced during the interviews was a sense of the broader definition of dramaturgy, and the directions it may take in the future of play development. And, in order for dramaturgy to keep moving forward, the lines of communication--the sharing of information--between dramaturges must be maintained. None of these individuals or organizations is working in a vacuum; establishing a network--like Playwrights' Workshop Montreal's exchanges with other companies nation-wide, or Banff's search for scripts from across Canada--helps them to grow.

How, then, does one develop such a network? And what obstacles must be overcome to achieve it?

PER BRASK:

You have to have that cross-fertilization going on, because otherwise you're just ending up with a group of self-satisfied people sitting around patting themselves on the back, and that isn't going to do anyone any good. I don't think [people know enough about what is going on in other parts of the country]. And again, it's money. First of all, you're dealing with the fact that not a lot of people can afford having dramaturges around--never mind shipping them to places where professional development could happen. It would be good for people to be able to go out to Vancouver and see what's happening at the New Play Centre for a couple of weeks, what's happening in Alberta, here [Manitoba], elsewhere--simply keeping in contact with the way people are working, etcetera.

I think the dramaturges should be doing that . . . maybe it's time for dramaturges to organize. There are so many simple things; every time you do something you're reinventing the wheel . . . . And why shouldn't we get together every once in a while and find out what people are doing, and why they're doing it? I don't even think that anybody knows how many--or how few--working dramaturges there are in the country.

JACE VAN DER VEEN:

It is true that everybody is so involved in their own territory; and because there is so much happening in their own territory, there is enough to be busy, and not have time to look outward for communication with other territories, so to speak. It almost takes an organization that has a vision, that sits down and looks much farther than the immediate necessities, and the immediate interests. And, it's really nice to hear that someone like Svetlana *is* thinking that way: that they are actually going beyond their immediate needs and looking at the future. The future obviously

says, Look, communication is bringing everybody much closer together globally, so Yes, let's start that *right now*, let's sow those seeds, and let's send those people out.

It's only possible insofar as the vision is strong enough, or if that vision is even there. But if that vision *isn't* there, then it won't happen, of course. So, it is possible, but whether it's likely--well, that, as I say, depends upon how much interest in your immediate territory there is (and there doesn't seem to be that much time to look beyond that). And I think, in a sense, we are living with that sort of territorial type of thing (We've got enough of our own, thank you very much . . .); and then something successful happens that is exported . . . . and everybody gets excited about it. But the excitement comes not so much from communicating with other regions, but from having created a product that can be sold in other regions. And that is very typical of certain mainstream political thinking, too. Our government is very interested in helping theatre companies that can create a product as quickly as possible so that we can *export* it, and create an image elsewhere--in Japan, or China . . . Unfortunately, they are looking at product; they want to see a product happen very quickly, rather than putting all their money and energy into the development of that product. I mean, it's good to work on a product that can ultimately be exported; it's one way to communicate with the rest of the world. But, how can we *help* each other, rather than how can we *sell* something to each other, would be a much more human way of going at it.

In Alberta, for instance, we have so much to do to develop playwriting and theatre in the province itself--even in the smaller places with non-professional or semi-professional theatre groups. So what we have here is something called *Workshops by Request* that the government started--the Department of Culture and Multiculturalism--and it provides funds for one professional to go out into a community for a week-end or a week to give them workshops in technical aspects, or acting, or directing (not so much in playwriting, however--and I've been pushing for that) . . . .

So within these communities--because there are territories within territories--the more we can develop that--and that has to be the next stage, I think--the better it is: i.e. send dramaturges into the province to work with groups on a new script. That is only possible when we get interest within community theatres to do something like that. So we have to stimulate the interest first; that way, perhaps it is possible to start connecting all these different territories.

BOB WHITE:

I was able to get around and see what other people were doing in the late seventies. And there doesn't seem to be a hell of a lot of that going on now: maybe because everyone is so busy surviving, and doing what they're doing.

SVETLANA ZYLIN:

> . . . It's through successful collaborations between people and the knowledge of those successful collaborations being disseminated to other theatres and to other play centres that confidence in the process will come, and that need to explore it further will come.

Of course, the real issue here is the continued existence and growth of the development process. And central to its existence, as with most things, is money: as Urjo Kareda points out, "the tragedy always is that as the funding gets tighter and tighter, it's the developmental stuff that gets cut, and developmental staff."[4] Because of the way in which Canadian theatre companies are predominantly funded--namely, by government and arms'-length agencies--there are always certain criteria upon which the granting of funds are hinged. Jace van der Veen mentions the emphasis government places on "product"--something that is marketable. With this sort of emphasis, the development of playwrights and playwriting may not be given the highest priority. And without new plays and playwrights, what happens to the future of the theatre? In this sense, the development of dramaturgy as a profession and the future of Canadian theatre in general are intertwined.

JACE VAN DER VEEN:

> There are so many possibilities, dramaturgically speaking. And, you see, dramaturgy--the larger meaning of dramaturgy--deals with connecting the artist and the audience, or art producing organizations and society. In Europe, what the dramaturge does is assist the Artistic Director in choosing the plays for the season . . . . In order to do that, the dramaturges have to have a sense of the need of the community. In other words, the dramaturge has to *research* the social senses, the social needs and the social temperament that would find an echo or a point of connection in the work that's being done on the stage.

Each of the individuals interviewed had a chance to express their vision of the future of Canadian theatre in light of their work in new play development. One of the most pressing issues that arose from these discussions was the direction that theatre companies are taking, and how they are responding to the communities in which they exist; or, in Jace van der Veen's words, "connecting . . . . art producing organizations and society." Since several of the interviewees are or have been in positions where they are

responsible for choosing seasons and shaping the direction a company is to take, their ideas about the creative growth of a company, its audience and the place for new play development within that framework is important to examine.

KIM MCCAW:

There are no formulas. It is really understanding what the role is that the company is to play in this community: What is the nature of that relationship to the community? Who are the writers that are creating work that can play a role in that relationship? And then, also being open to what the response is--and where does that take you next? You don't just keep going along the same path; you've got to *hear* what your audience says back--to agree with it or disagree with it, or challenge it, or argue with it, or apologize . . . There are a million different responses. And the successful companies, the exciting companies, are the ones that have the most interesting and developed and productive relationship, and the companies that are in trouble are the ones that have somehow lost that--whether it be through bad work, or death to your community, or a sick community. There are some communities in this country that are in a lot of trouble--economic trouble or otherwise; it can be a very difficult time for a theatre company in those places. What can we do, and how can we be of value to this community now? Sometimes it's simply by offering relief; other times it can be by offering wisdom; other times it can be by offering vision; other times it can be by offering alternatives. That's the challenge--and that's where you can be very successful or you have it all blow up in your face!

Again, I think the healthy organizations are the ones that can be clearest about what it is that they are there to do, and that also have a collection of the right resources available that allow them to move in that direction, that allow them to have the flexibility and the wisdom to adapt and adjust without simply blowing in the wind of popularity . . . or panic.

PER BRASK:

Over the past twenty years--from the boom to the bust in the theatre in English-speaking Canada--one thing that's become clear is that audiences are becoming increasingly indifferent to what happens on the stages. And no one can afford to let that happen--audiences cannot afford to let that happen, and theatre practitioners cannot afford to let that happen. So continuing on the same mill is clearly not the answer. It's becoming more and more evident to most theatre practitioners--certainly most theatre practitioners I speak to--that it is importa. that the event be infused with passion, and all of those traditional things that one used to require, and that it's no longer good enough to fall asleep during the second act. There is no nobility in simply going and hearing the theatre, you simply can't coast on that; in fact something must *happen*, something must *take place*.

I think that most theatre practitioners are completely aware of that, and I think that if you go and speak to any artistic director at the moment--even of the most conservative theatre--you will hear that person talk about the need for that. It's just that going about making it happen is becoming increasingly difficult in the structures that we are currently working under, because (a) they're underfunded, and (b) they're structures that don't work--but they're structures that you can't change very easily without it costing a lot of money. Therefore I believe firmly that the answer is going to come from outside the traditional structure.

ROB WHITE:

The Factorys, and the Tarragons, and the Passe Murailles are pretty mainstream sort of organizations now; and, in their own way, suffer from the same constraints that a real mainstream regional like ATP or Citadel suffers--in a different context, though. And therefore, the Jackies and the Urjos don't have the latitude that even I had [eight] years ago running that theatre, unless they reinvent themselves (and Jackie is talking about doing that now, and it will be interesting to see how a structure like the Factory can reinvent itself). I am convinced that those theatres, to remain viable, have to continually reinvent themselves. One of the reasons that the Toronto Free disappeared was that it wasn't able to reinvent itself--I mean, it reinvented itself into this other thing (whatever that is), but whether or not that's a positive step . . . well, I think the jury's going to be in on that one for a long time . . .

PAMELA HAWTHORN:

Now I would like to say, though, that the theatre scene is changing, audiences are different, and the Canadian play is being done everywhere--from the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton to the lowliest two-bench kind of space. So, just the mere fact of producing a Canadian play now is meaningless, because everything's getting produced. I think the developmental companies are having a hard time--and have been for some time now--trying to redefine what their role is in the Canadian theatre scene, because in many respects their role has been usurped by other theatre companies. Other theatre companies now *must* produce new Canadian plays in order to get funded by the Canada Council, so everybody's out there scrambling for what they think is a producible new play. So the developmental companies are just out there scrambling like everybody else. I think there is a profound rethinking going on for the developmental theatres: some are doing it more successfully than others, and some are redefining their roles altogether. Factory Lab, I think, is an interesting example of a theatre company that really started out as a developmental theatre, and nowadays--and I may be wrong here, because I'm not talking with Jackie Maxwell, and I don't really follow Factory life in any kind of intimate way--I think has become entirely a production house, with practically no development going on. Playwrights' Workshop Montreal, on the other hand, has always kept to the strictly workshop process, and may continue to do so.

I'm just saying that for the New Play Centre in . . . [recent] years this has become a significant philosophical problem, and one that hasn't been solved *yet*, but certainly one that the company has been grappling with and trying to work out.

KIM MCCAW:

I think there's some other interesting things that need to be addressed that we aren't addressing very well yet, in terms of mainstream theatres. Right now most of the work that we see in most of the mainstream theatre companies is mostly done by white, middle class people. Most of our cities are changing fairly dramatically away from that dominant, white, Eurocentric mix. Theatres are going to have to respond to that changing ecology of the communities. And they have to change *fast*, or they will become irrelevant to large parts of their communities. And, as soon as they become irrelevant, they die. So that change is going to have to occur.

I also think that what is going to happen is that a lot of the work that we are going to see is going to be done by small, independent groups--companies or artist-centred initiatives. And, the institutions will become resources for them, but, in some cases, the institutions will not be the producers but will be centres for production/presentation. I think they are going to be able to operate cheaper, with lower expectations, lower overheads and all that other practical stuff; they will be more flexible, and they will be able to have different ways of creating work--other than the institutional way that we have now.

PAMELA HAWTHORN:

I mean, I'm a conservative human being, so my first impulse--because I'm also of that generation--is to look back. But no, I don't think that in human terms that is the right answer. I think you have to struggle to find new forms and new ideas for new times, and I don't think looking back is the answer. Probably [new people should be coming in and changing the structures]. I think most people--and there are a few geniuses around--have about one really good idea in their lifetime, and there's got to be some new good ideas out there.

In order to assure the continued growth of Canadian theatre--and playwriting--the development process needs to be encouraged and supported; it must continue to evolve. To do that requires funding, of course; but of equal importance is the interest of the communities in which that development is taking place. As Kim McCaw points out, shrinking budgets are creating headaches for many Canadian artistic directors, who are constantly trying to find ways to save--or make--money. Unfortunately, some of these survival measures

may lead to a decrease in the quality of the work and, ultimately, to a lack of interest in what the company produces.

KIM MCCAW:

I don't know [how you continue to get support for development]. I don't know at all. I just spent eight years as an Artistic Director struggling with various forms of that question. How can I, how can we, how can a company get more resources available to the production of the work? If you look at companies across the country--whether they're doing new work or existing plays--budgets are under more and more stress. And, the solutions that are being found to balance budgets are basically at the expense of the artistic activity. It could mean reducing the size of plays--and that's not in itself bad, but what you're doing is you're restricting the choice of material that you can explore. So those are the sorts of things that are being found as solutions to the financial crisis. And that's potentially very dangerous.

The other one is usually to in some way reduce the amount of resources that are put to the production of the work: cutting down the rehearsal time, cutting down the production staff, cutting down on development money. Some theatres have budgets for development--whether it be for workshops or commissions or dramaturges--and those are probably areas that are among the first to be reduced when you have to make reductions. I know that was the case at PTE. And those, again, are potentially very dangerous decisions because if we dry up the aspect of our operation that is creating the work, the work itself is going to suffer. And if the work starts to reduce in quality, then its power and effectiveness and strength in communicating to an audience is going to be reduced. The audience is then going to go on to something else--and then the resources are going to be reduced even more. So it becomes a downward spiral.

This "downward spiral" is central to the concerns expressed during the course of these interviews about the future of Canadian theatre. How does the effective use of development resources relate to a company's relationship with its audience? Programming--and this includes both new and existing works--is certainly another area in which the dramaturgical skills of "[researching] the social senses" come into play.

JACE VAN DER VEEN:

Intuitively, every artistic director probably tries to [find a connection to their community through the work they produce]: in that sense the artistic director becomes a dramaturge. I remember in coming to Northern Light Theatre it was only after one or two seasons that I had that intuitive choosing. Although I did *True West* as my first play there (I looked at the title!--and I loved Sam

Shepard). But then, as I went on, I became more conscious of what I perceived the needs--or the concerns--of the community to be, and tried to reflect that in choosing what I chose. Hence the last show of my season was *Jessica*: it was the first *major* play here, in this town, dealing that way--mystical, shamanistic and also theatrical--with the Native condition.[5]

But then, I also did *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, by Dario Fo, Italian playwright: I think multicultural, I think socialism . . . and I mix my metaphors a little bit. The irony is that I thought this would get all the Italians out to see it. It didn't. And that leads one to think of our situation, and what kind of people are coming over from Italy: first of all, not the ones that love theatre--and Edmonton's Italian community is very small--but secondly, a lot of our Italian community aren't socialist--on the contrary, often! So I thought I would get money from the community; I spoke to several members of the Italian community about money, and some of them said, Well, it's that type of play, this guy, Dario Fo, he's not something we'd like to . . . So I thought, Oh, I *see*!

Now a dramaturge, I think, would be more aware of all these things, and focus on these things, and would say, If you want to do something multicultural, if you want to reach the Italian community, then take a look at what that Italian community wants, or likes. For example, in terms of the Jewish community, it certainly showed in the production of *The Diary of Anne Frank*--a lot of the Jewish community came.

JUDITH RUDAKOFF:

[Dramaturges could be very useful in terms of audience development] and audience education. However, the theatres don't usually have the money to hire the people to do just that. It's a shame, because audience education is vital, and it's not perceived as being vital. Everybody seems to think that marketing will do that; marketing is the new god . . . . [A person] who [does] not go to theatre may end up the marketing manager of a theatre company, and this can result in the treatment of art as a commodity. But, it doesn't have to be depressing; it should be invigorating. It should make us feel like we have to do something about it. I think we really have to work at keeping an art form honest and keeping progress alive.

PAMELA HAWTHORN:

I think that the general public needs to be educated all the time in terms of what art is, and what it takes to produce art. And from my point of view, through the history of man, that has always been a developmental process. It may appear that you get a Michelangelo bursting upon the scene out of the coffee shop--but you don't; you get him bursting out of the scene because there's been two hundred years of developmental process and artists working to the point where a Michelangelo somehow happens. He happens because he's a genius; he happens--depending upon your

theological point of view-- because God touched him. But he doesn't happen out of whole cloth: he happens out of a society and an artistic culture that has developed to the point where he happens. So, from my point of view, to say that art needs a developmental structure is just to state a truism. Of course it does; that's the only way it's ever produced. The problem is nowadays that the taxpayer is the patron, and I guess to a certain extent we have to somehow educate the taxpayer into being happy with that role--whereas in the old days, the King was the patron, and he could bloody well do what he wanted to.

PER BRASK:

I think that the responsibility [for developing the audience and its interest in the theatre] is on the part of the theatre. The responsibility is that if theatre is to become important to people, it must intervene in ways that matter to people, or else why should they bother coming. If you keep teaching people that theatre is two hours of burping time after a meal, then that's how they'll treat it. And then they walk out after having seen a show for two hours, and they say, Boy, that was a good meal that we had two hours ago.

If we look at the economic fact that real wages in this country, over the course of the past seven or eight years, have gone down, and we look at the fact that at the same time, the prices of theatre tickets have gone up significantly, then we can tell immediately that the available dollars that there are for people to go to the theatre are very few and far between. That's one factor. You add to that that mainly when they go they're not having a particularly good time, and they come out of it bored. If people had tons of money, then maybe they would go out to theatre and get bored every night; but under the current, real situation, that isn't going to happen. And, the thing is that unfortunately, most of the theatres across this country interpret this as a need for them to do more 'entertainment,' instead of looking at how to create excitement.

KIM MCCAW:

I think it takes really clear thinking to know what you mean when you say audience development. I think there is a real challenge in developing the right kind of dialogue with the audience. What is the nature of this relationship? What are the expectations--from each side? I remember years ago--on one of my first trips down to Blyth--speaking with some members of the audience, and I said, The tradition of a summer theatre company: this is the kind of company that usually does light, silly, imported successes for the most part. You folks have done the exact opposite: you've become successful with plays that nobody's ever heard of because this is the first time they've been done. I don't get it. They replied, For us it's more interesting to see something that nobody else has seen. It's as simple as that.

Now, it does go beyond that. A company like Blyth has been extremely successful in developing a very clear relationship with its audience. That's right; [people know what to expect when they go there]. There's also obviously a built-in trap in that, which is that you can find yourself as a producer making choices that you think will please your audience rather than choices that *might* take your audience in a different direction than they were expecting. You have to be very careful that you aren't looking only for approval. You have to be able to risk disapproval in order to make a point that's important to you.

BOB WHITE:

. . . Again, it's that connection to the audience that's so important to me: that's one of the things I've learned over the years--and certainly by coming here [ATP]. At the Factory I could do whatever I wanted, and I didn't care about the audience at all: if they came, great; if they didn't, well, we'll do another one. But in a city like Toronto, there's enough different things. Here [in Calgary], you have a very wide range of audience members coming to your show, and, because it's a smaller community, you've got a broader response to the work. So it allows me to include the audience response, if you will, into the criteria that I use to decide whether or not a play should be done. It's not the most dominant one by any means--I still do the plays I believe in, and that I believe should be done--but it does factor itself in there. It therefore becomes an important choice, an important factor in making those decisions.

KIM MCCAW:

We often talk about 'educating' our audience, or 'stretching' our audience, or 'challenging' our audience at theatre companies. I often think that that's not in fact what we mean. What we really mean is that we want to *change* our audience--which is not necessarily a bad thing--but I think if that's the case, a producer needs to be very clear about what the consequences are. You program a particular play that you think will 'challenge' your audience; that probably means that a portion of your audience will leave as a result. And, what you're really hoping is that a *different* group of people will come. And then you will have *changed* your audience. That can be very exciting; it can also be disastrous.

There's all sorts of consequences of that kind of choice. At the same time, we need courage in those kinds of choices, and we need wisdom in those kinds of choices. Producers do need to be able to evaluate the kind of relationship they have and try and understand if change is *needed* in that relationship.

JACE VAN DER VEEN:

Well, I think the secret [to getting out of the rut so many companies are in] lies in finding more playwrights with an individual and uniquely theatrical voice, and developing that voice as much as you can so that they become a strong voice. It's all back to the personal thing: for example, Brad Fraser, as a person, has a very distinct style that he espouses, and it's really good that he's been pushed by several different theatres (he's worked with Theatre Network, he's worked with Workshop West). These theatres saw a strong artist and pushed that artist, whether it fit in with their philosophical attitude as a theatre company or not. Fraser is not a typical Workshop West or Theatre Network playwright. So, there is that--maybe there is a push to discovering an individual and pushing that individual, rather than pushing a company's philosophical attitude. Whether that's good or not, I don't know. What it does do is allow for stronger personal colours to come out in the production.

And I can see, in a sense, difficulty, because people in the marketplace --the audiences--tend to get used to a particular kind of style or message that comes from a theatre company, and that's why they will get a season ticket; they will say, Well, that company tends to do things that I like. That may disappear. But then, some people say the whole idea of seasons will disappear, and the audience may start choosing the individual play, and go to it, rather than go to a whole season from one company.

BOB WHITE:

ATP is in this process of going for stronger and stronger material every year. Where it was pretty mainstream pap not that long ago . . . . it has now evolved. We're doing plays that are requiring more than just TV responses to the material. And I think you cannot expect people to just jump on the bandwagon--you have to present a context for the work, so that they can understand it and appreciate it. And I don't think there's anything patronizing about that, or anything that demeans your work as an artist. If you really want to do these kinds of plays, and they have no experience with seeing these kinds of plays, well you better show them what the frame is. I mean, if all they're used to seeing is Andrew Wyeth, and now you expect them to deal with Picasso, well, I'm sorry, you've got to be able to bridge that gap for them, without being patronizing. And *that's our job* as a theatre--that's what it's all about. All of that stuff is not as important as the work, but it's got to be there, or else why should people pay you any attention?

And I think that [educating our audience about what it means to see a new play is] part of our function, absolutely--again, without apologizing. It's just a mind-set: if you know you're going to see something for the first time, and you know what that *means*, then you're going to make different demands on the work than you're going to make on seeing the eight-thousandth production of *Hamlet*. *And you should.* But that's very hard for an audience that's geared to

'entertainment' and 'product'--and especially when ticket prices are so high, as they are here . . . 'Why did I pay thirty-two dollars for *that*?'--well, I don't know, because I sure couldn't afford it! It's difficult . . .

"Connecting" audiences and theatres; "bridging the gap": how can this union be achieved? Fringe festivals, second stages and new play festivals are all ways in which the profile of new plays and playwrights can be raised.

JUDITH RUDAKOFF:

In the 90s the festival and/or fringe method of play development has burgeoned. While these are often more a boon to audience development (cheap tickets, multiple venues, carnival atmosphere, hour-or-less running time) than play development, there's no denying the pluses of this approach which are translated into playwright profile. Often an early play is picked up for development by a theatre or dramaturge after a fringe. While I still believe that a play given a production too soon can suffer (production values can obscure flaws or a writer can become too attached to an early draft once it's 'fixed' in production), the convention-like/shopping around atmosphere of non-judgemental audiences does have merits.

BOB WHITE:

What we all have to find is a way to produce more plays on a minimal scale. The economics have dictated safer programming: programming where the people are going to know who the writers are, to a certain extent. And therefore it becomes increasingly difficult even for theatres . . . And we do a lot of second productions here [ATP], which I'm happy that we're able to do. But it's only based on the fact that we know that *The Rez Sisters* has a certain amount of cachet behind it, and hype behind it. You know that you can sell it--even though it's going to be a difficult sale--because it has proven itself previously. But to do a play by an unknown person, in a mainstage slot, would just be economic suicide for us, unless the play had some certain kind of pedigree . . .

And so, I think what we have to find are ways of doing the small-scale productions, where the writer is going to learn by seeing his play done in front of an audience for x-many performances. Then they can go on to write the next play, and find out what that experience is all about.

KIM MCCAW:

> . . . . Profile is not the only thing. I think at times we've done a disservice to plays by putting them on in the wrong venues or for the wrong audiences; they haven't really received the kind of response that was most useful to the play. At times we've used smaller stages and workshops as consolation prizes--which has also been an abuse. On the other hand, sometimes the smaller studio at a theatre is *exactly* the right venue for a play, and it shouldn't be put on in a big theatre because it's going to kill it--and I'm not just talking about new plays, but any play. I'm not sure where that takes us . . .

BOB WHITE:

> I think it's probably creating those opportunities so that the work does happen. I think this is where the creative thinking has to happen right now: indeed in finding the venues and the way of producing the work. I think playRites is one creative response to that issue. And there have got to be other formulas for other communities to be developed as well.

Developing "creative response[s]" to producing new work is a key part of the dramaturgical contribution to the Canadian theatre scene. Regardless of what they call themselves, theatre professionals involved in new play development must not only work within the theatrical community, but outside it, to generate support for the process.

However, how that support is generated varies. And, in a sense, how to generate support for new plays--and, further, for theatre in general--is one of the key dramaturgical issues in Canada. It is in this area, perhaps, that the dramaturge in Canada can find a niche: in being a supporter of the playwright both in the theatre, and in the community at large.

Notes

1. Meredith Levine, "The Directors' Colloquium at Calgary: The Director's Role: 1/ The Workshops: Transformations," *Canadian Theatre Review*, No. 52 (Fall 1987), p. 4.

2. *Canadian Theatre Review*, No. 52 (Fall, 1987).

3. Joanne Conian, "The Directors' Colloquium at Calgary: 4/ From the Conceptual to the Concrete," *Canadian Theatre Review*, No. 52 (Fall 1987), p. 21.

4. Personal Interview with Urjo Kareda, February 18, 1992.

5. In Edmonton, *Jessica* was the first play done in a mainstream, subscription-based theatre "dealing that way . . . . with the Native condition." However, there was other work being created and produced by Alberta Native communities prior to that, by groups such as the Ben Calf Robe School and the Wabasca/Desmarais Native Youth Theatre.

Conclusion:

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE: THE CANADIAN DRAMATURGE AT WORK

It seems to me that central to the dramaturge's work in Canada is the creation of an environment where writers can practice the art and the craft of playwriting. And there are several things at work here that can help to define what it is that a dramaturge does within a Canadian theatrical context.

Creating. Creativity is certainly not limited to that which results in something tangible, like a script. Dramaturgy has a creative function because it involves imagination and sensitivity: it is a new process every time, with every play and with every playwright, requiring the dramaturge to draw upon a range of skills, experiences and sensibilities in order to respond to the playwright's needs in the work.

Environment: place, both abstract and concrete. The abstract--psychological, intellectual--is the relationship between the playwright and the dramaturge. It involves, primarily, trust and respect, an ability to communicate, and an openness to a broad range of creative vision. It may be as simple as having a dramaturge read a draft of a play and discuss their response with the writer. Or, it may be more complex, involving a more detailed discussion of the writing, its structure, its intentions. Nevertheless, it is a place where the playwright can take the first steps away from the isolation of the act of writing; a step towards the larger place--the theatre--where the words on the page will be given form.

The concrete--the workshop, the rehearsal hall, the theatre--is where the play begins to take on a physical form. It is as necessary to the life of a play as the act of writing, since the play, by its very nature, exists as something to be performed. The dramaturgical role in this area is taken on by a variety of individuals: the artistic director of a play development organization or theatre company, who lays the groundwork so

that the work can happen; the director, showing how the writing translates into performance.

But the concrete goes beyond the theatre as such. Because in order for play development situations to exist, the need for new plays must exist, the need for theatre must exist.

It is this larger area, one that encompasses the entire community in which theatre is taking place, that I find so intriguing in terms of possibilities for Canadian dramaturgy. Jace van der Veen talked about "the theory that since the arts serve a social good, the responsibility to perpetuate that good, and increase that good, should be spread"[1] around. Of course, getting society at large to acknowledge and respond involves a kind of dialogue. Beginning that dialogue, and sustaining it, seems to me to be a dramaturgical function--and, again, a creative function in that it requires imagination and vision.

Beginning the dialogue involves reaching out to prospective audiences, and involving them with the theatrical process. It means, perhaps, communicating what is unique about going to the theatre--as opposed to going to a film, or a concert, or a sporting event. It also means responding to the dynamics within a particular community, and understanding what it is that it wants--if anything--from the theatre.

The difficulty, of course, is in balancing the creative visions of theatre practitioners with the desires of a community. And it seems to me that satisfying one does not necessarily have to mean sacrificing the other. On the part of the theatrical community, it means perhaps encouraging local writers to write for a theatre; it may also mean producing plays of a particular theatrical genre within that theatre. However, in order to draw support from society for theatre, and for new plays, the theatrical process--specifically, the play development process--must be demythologized, in a sense: audiences should understand what it is they are seeing, and, indeed, participating in.

Of course, this all goes back to the old saying: "You can't please all of the people all of the time." And

that is, perhaps, as it should be, because the nature of art is such that it can elicit only a subjecuve response. An audience is essential to theatre--theatre practitioners are always conscious of this fact. However, audiences are not always aware of the importance of their being there, of their response. This type of awareness can only come about through a process of education: not necessarily trying to change what people like to see, but making them aware of things they may not even know they would like to see.

The reason this educative process should be done by dramaturges--as opposed to being relegated to the world of marketing--is that essential to the dramaturgical role is a knowledge of what it takes to evolve a play and a theatrical performance, as well as a love for the medium, and a conviction as to its importance. To a certain extent, artistic directors serve this function in choosing certain plays for their seasons, and, in some cases, setting up other events at their theatres such as new play festivals or public workshops. Certainly, the dramaturge is not, at present, a permanent fixture in most Canadian theatre companies. However, maybe that should change, at least in part.

Maybe an organization like Playwrights' Workshop Montreal can expand on the situations in which it sends a dramaturge out to work with another company. Rather than working with a specific playwright or play, perhaps a dramaturge can work with a particular artistic director in setting up avenues of outreach into their community. Or an association like Playwrights' Union of Canada can expand on its playwrights' tours[2], including a wider range of groups to connect with. Perhaps arts councils and government ministries can include this sort of public outreach in their programs.

Listing these possibilities makes enlarging the sphere of the dramaturge's influence sound easy, which it most certainly is not. But it points to a direction that a national dialogue on dramaturgy can take in the future. A direction that involves work within the play development process, but is not limited to it. A direction that involves generating support in society as a whole for the creation of theatre. A direction that broadens the scope of dramaturgical possibilities in creating environments where playwrights can write.

Notes

1. Personal Interview with Jace van der Veen, April 23, 1991.

2. For example, PUC Ontario Provincial Tours, with readings and workshops by playwrights for students across the province. See "Truckin' for Bucks: Playwrights Tours: Yours to Discover," *CanPlay*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (February, 1988), pp. 31-2.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: DRAMATURGY AND NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT, 1970-1990

It must be noted that the following bibliography is a *selected* one, and is limited to items published between 1970 and 1990. There are many more sources that are only to be found in various companies' archives, at the Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library, at the University of Guelph's Drama Archives, or at the University of Alberta's Archives. Nevertheless, in terms of 'mainstream' Canadian theatre literature (i.e. *Canadian Theatre Review*, *Canadian Drama*, *Theatrum*, *CanPlay*, etc.), the following bibliography is fairly comprehensive for the period.

Because an extensive study of new play development in Canada did not exist when I began this work, it became necessary for me to compile my own list of published materials about new play development in Canada. As Bob White suggested, this lack is perhaps best explained by the fact that the concept of new play dramaturgy--as it exists, now--in Canada is a relatively new one, dating back only about twenty years. The bibliography that follows is the result of my initial research into this area.

I would like to acknowledge Mary Blackstone for the short bibliography provided in DRAMA 607 (Spring, 1990), which, in part, prompted me to do this study. I am extremely grateful for the assistance of James DeFelice and Jan Selman, who have been constantly on the look-out for new articles on the subject. As well, I would like to thank James DeFelice for the use of his personal archives on Playwrights' Co-op and Playwrights' Workshop Montreal. I would like to thank Shane Corrigan at Playwrights' Workshop Montreal for providing an invaluable information package on PWM. And, finally, Alex Hawkins for his assistance and encouragement as supervisor in the creation of this bibliography.

NOTE:

The sections in this bibliography are organized to highlight certain areas related to new play development, and were useful in my own preliminary research. The 'General' section, it must be noted, includes articles that are not limited to Canadian sources or topics. While it is by no means comprehensive, I have included this section as background material for the study of dramaturgy in general--as well as its practice internationally--as a comparison to what exists in Canada.

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A NOTE ON APPENDICES:

The nine interviews contained much more material than I was able to include in the main body of this work. There are some commentaries that may be of interest and should be made accessible to others. Some of these passages are of a more personal nature, dealing with particular experiences and relationships with playwrights and the play development process, while others explore the nature of the theatrical event, and the dramaturgy of performance.

APPENDIX 1: PERSONAL ACCOUNTS OF THE DRAMATURGICAL PROCESS

BEGINNINGS:

SVETLANA ZYLIN:

I worked at the New Play Centre a number of years ago, yes. I actually began working in the late sixties/early seventies in Vancouver, and my work with new play development started primarily from a feminist focus because, at that time, very few women were writing for the theatre--and, in Canada, virtually none. And, I was in a theatre department where I continually saw--as a result of the dearth of material for women--really talented women students being relegated to small, insignificant and unsatisfying parts. So, I started a theatre company called the Women's Theatre Cooperative, and out of the two-and-a-half years' work with that company, we as [a] group developed new material and got involved with women writers from other milieus to develop material. I was also doing work with local playwrights, where, as a director of new work, they would come to me for assistance or advice, and then I would--in some cases--facilitate meetings or workshops with the New Play Centre for these playwrights.

I started as a director of new work. Most of my dramaturgical training came from the field: from that hands-on work with playwrights.

. . . . You have to understand that for me, work with new play development came as a result of my need to work, and--aside from the fact that I was committed to developing a Canadian theatre repertoire, because, as a new Canadian, I had a much stronger nationalist bent than some other people that I knew--I came to it as 'make-work' for myself. If I hadn't developed my own material, if I hadn't directed primarily new Canadian work in many instances, I would not have been working.

JACE VAN DER VEEN:

I realized that if I wanted to go into theatre work seriously, I had to go back to school--so I went to UBC, and did my graduate work there. And that got me to Vancouver, and *that* got me to the New Play Centre.

Now it's interesting that sometimes you do things 'in spite of' . . . One of our directing projects at UBC was directing a new play. So, I had this play called *File Thirteen*, and it was very socio-political, about corruption in big business in B.C. (in mills, etc.). And the playwright was a very 'strong guy'--physically strong, strong voice, strong opinions--and really felt very strongly about

his subject. So, I thought I should ask him to play the lead role, so that he could be his own voice--great! However, he was not a very good actor, and he couldn't get enough of his own voice, and he was not easy to direct *at all*. I remember my prof. saying afterwards, Well, I guess you could sense the *waves of revulsion* coming from your audience during the performance of the play that you directed . . . ? So, I learned my first lesson: Beware of casting playwrights in their own plays.

But I guess, coming out of UBC, I still had that interest in working with new plays and playwrights. And the New Play Centre was *just starting out*: we held workshops--in an attic somewhere--and that's where we rehearsed our first, small productions of new plays (Tom Cone's, Sheldon Rosen's).

And, that's how it all started. I got to do more workshops, work with more playwrights (I directed *Walls* by Christian Bruyère). I became Associate Director with New Play Centre, as time went on, and was with them for about seven years.

BOB WHITE ON GEORGE WALKER:

. . . He's a very private guy, that's for sure. But don't forget, there were ten years--over ten years--when he couldn't get arrested! It just started with *Film Noir*--and then, *Criminals in Love*, I guess, was the major one--where any of the shows were even successful in Toronto. And even then it was relatively minor, until the big breakthrough with *Nothing Sacred*, and then this one [*Love and Anger*]. But his tendency--I mean, up until recently--was only to do interviews in order to get coverage for the shows. So that to do any sort of background like you're doing--he would just never see why.

. . . . [Factory Theatre] is where I did first meet him. When I arrived that year, they had done *Sacktown Rag*--in the spring, I guess--and *Bagdad Saloon* was scheduled for production that winter. But the theatre was closed by Equity in the fall of '72 for kickbacks (everyone was getting paid sixty-five dollars a week, and they had to kickback fifty just to keep the theatre going). During that period of time I got various other jobs around town. They were prepared to do *Bagdad Saloon*, and I think it resurfaced in spring of '73 when they were given a five thousand dollar grant--from Labatt's or something--which enabled them to put the production together, and eventually do it . . .

So that's when I met him--on that play. Although I didn't really know him very well, we sort of clicked. I left there in '74--about a year later--to go back to Montreal. I sort of knew him through that period, but I didn't do any work on *Bagdad Saloon* per se . . . But when I came back to Toronto in '78--back to the Factory--that's when we picked up the relationship.

I came back to the Factory because of George. I'd been working at Playwrights' Workshop Montreal, and had decided to leave there. I was in Toronto seeing plays over a week-end. I was wandering down Yonge Street, and I just ran into him; and he said, Well, Bob, let's go have a coffee . . . And this was this very weird transitional point at the Factory: Ken Gass had left--sort of--and George was sort of artistic director, but he really didn't want to be. And so I think literally what happened was that he saw me, and said, Gee, Bob would be great . . . Over this coffee, he talked me into coming back to the Factory, under the false premise--sort of--that he was going to be artistic director . . .

By the time I got the job running the workshops--so I wasn't artistic director at this point--he, of course, had since abdicated, so there was nobody there running the joint. So it was kind of weird there for a period of about five or six months--I was thinking, Well, I'm running this workshop program, is Ken Gass artistic director or not?--but there was no money, so I didn't think it mattered much. It took that five or six months before I kind of had to say, I *do* want to be artistic director; and everyone went, Oh, thank God someone wants the job! [And I stayed for] nine years.

The first project that we worked on was *Rumours of Our Death*--which grew out of a workshop that I dramaturged in '78--that went into production in '80, I guess it was . . . early '80. I was actually acting in that one as well.

But it's hard to describe the working relationship with him in any kind of traditional terms, because any show I've worked on with him--up until *Beautiful City*--he was directing as well as writing. So we had this kind of relationship where I'd get an early draft of the play, and I would talk about it--but not in the kind of 'Scene Two sucks, don't you think . . .' sort of way. It was all very informal, and not, 'Oh, we're going to sit down and talk about the play now.' Most of the work would involve me in rehearsals: more as the artistic director going into rehearsal--just observing--and then talking to the director. Because George changes very, very little in rehearsal: he goes in there with the script, and stuff does happen, but . . .

That changed with *Beautiful City*, the first show that I was officially directing. There was a lot of rewriting that went on in that rehearsal period--I suppose mostly instigated by me. But it certainly didn't affect the structure of the play: it had to do with what was happening in scenes, and things like that.

I mean, in the early eighties, it was more about cooking up schemes: the whole *Film Noir* thing about pretending it was written by this French absurdist playwright. We had no money, and we wanted to be part of the Toronto International Theatre Festival, so we said, Okay, we'll do a late-night show . . . He'd written what was *Theatre of the Film Noir*--in fact it grew out of a little one-act that they'd done at one of the Works festivals--and, of course, it's just basically a rip-off of *Funeral Rites* by Jean Genet. So most of the effort went into cooking up the scheme that this

was going to be a late-night play, written by this French absurdist playwright that we'd somehow discovered and that George had done the translation of. Of course, no one even thought of the fact that George can't even *read* French, or anything like that--they just bought it.

They were all sort of these larky projects, really, as opposed to, 'We're going to do a play.' It was always informed by this sense of fun. And the working relationship between us was always based on that, too.

But it was tied to the notion of what we did at the Factory, as well; it did extend to other playwrights besides George. It was, first and foremost, a playwrights' theatre. And certainly as our most eminent alumnus--and it still extends to this day, there--whatever George wants, George gets. So the notion was servicing the play, and what did George want to do this time . . .

. . . . George and I are two *totally different* people, but I know that basically we do vibrate at the same area about the work, about what the theatre is . . . . I can think of an example of it. In *Beautiful City*, in the alley scene . . . everyone's there on stage, and they've all come for the big showdown. And we were rehearsing away, and I was terrified--nine people on stage--what am I going to do with all these people? I was panicking! So we're plodding along in rehearsal one day, and George comes up to me--as the playwright to the director--and says, Well, it's *boring*, you've got to change the picture! And I said, Look, I just can't change it, something's *got to happen*! And he says, Oh, a gun . . . and we get the whole bit where Mary goes for the gun. It all *came out of that moment*; and of course, it's a perfect moment. Everybody gets guns out, and it becomes, in fact, the climactic moment in the play--which did not exist before when they just confronted each other, and Diane the cop came in . . . There was no fight . . . And I said, Gun? You can't just pull out guns . . . and he said, Yeah, yeah, yeah, they'll do this and . . . So he goes away, and comes back five minutes later with it . . . and so, Okay, kids, here it is . . . And of course it makes perfect sense, and it worked magic . . . You see, that's where it comes out of: me going, You want this, and I can't do that, because why would anybody do that . . .

. . . . With George--I mean, George certainly had no theatre background . . . but he got it so fast, so quick . . . born to the theatre in a certain sense . . . he only kind of exists there. Some of my best experiences with George have been backstage on opening nights. It's so weird . . . *The Art of War* was one of the best. There was no place for us to go, because the dressing rooms were over there . . . So we were literally *underneath the set*--in this strange little place, where we were just drinking and stuff--while the opening night performance of *The Art of War* is happening over us. And just to watch him was very odd . . . He was responding to *every nuance of the moment* on stage--and you realized that he was *so intimately tied* into the script, and to the performance--it was so joyous! And then, when things would bomb, it would be sad; and when things would work, it would be great.

URJO KAREDA ON JOAN MACLEOD:

Over a long period of time, I've had many kinds of working relationships. Take Joan [MacLeod], for instance: I had the relationship with her when she first sent me her material and I invited her into the Unit; then I had the experience of her being in the Unit for that year, and the kind of work we did there. Since that time, what she usually does is, as she's writing something, she gives me stuff, I read it, we discuss it, she goes back to work on it again. It's usually one-on-one, initiated by her--she decides when to set the deadlines--and she has an office here, so we see each other a lot.

In most cases, that's basically what you do: you *respond* to stuff the playwright gives you--make notes, talk about it, edit.

KIM MCCAW ON WENDY LILL, PATRICK FRIESEN, MARTHA BROOKS:

[The work] really varies, depending on the writer. Over the last two years, primarily in my role at PTE, I dealt with a lot of different writers. And, from that large group of writers, I developed fairly strong relationships with half a dozen of them. I've done a lot of work with Wendy Lill--I've done four of her plays over the years there--and she was out here working on her most recent one. (Patrick Friesen, Martha Brooks: those are writers that I've done more than one play with.) So, the two of us have developed a way that we work with each other. And in each case, it's profoundly different. With Wendy, part of it is simply the fact that she lives in Halifax and I live in Winnipeg. So, what happens is, she sends me material--sometimes it starts with one page--this is where the play is beginning. And I write back. We do most of it by writing back and forth to each other. And then there's a point at which we'll usually have a few long phone calls. Whereas with someone like Martha--because she lives in Winnipeg--we'll have long conversations where she'll come down to the theatre or we'll go for lunch and we will talk at great length about the play . . . And, once the play starts showing up in draft, we'll do everything--for example, me being able to get a workshop put together for her. I remember with one of her plays--and I had never done this with anyone before at that time--we spent an entire day literally going through the play line-by-line; not criticizing, but just saying, Why this? or, Why that? And it was a beautiful play--one of the nicest children's plays I've ever worked on.

APPENDIX 2: PERFORMANCE DRAMATURGY AND THE NATURE OF THEATRE

PER BRASK:

[There is a] change [in] our sensitivity to the notion of performance--as opposed to interpretation--of a play; that is starting to become a little sharper. And I think that will affect a number of things: it will affect how it is we look at theatre, and it will affect the playwright's role in it. It behooves playwrights in English-speaking Canada to take another look at how it is plays come about--as is already happening in the rest of the Western world. The play is not necessarily a pre-given phenomenon, which a bunch of people then get together around and spend three weeks trying to interpret, and then put in front of an audience. That whole kind of hierarchical structure is in need of some serious reevaluations. If we focus on theatre as a presentational event, as a performance event--as opposed to theatre as an interpretive event--then we can start to think about the dramaturgy of performance. Which means that dramaturgy then becomes part of a much more concrete way of relating to events on a stage, and the orchestration of events on a stage.

. . . . In a more imagistic theatre that we know from Quebec--the text may be at the originating point in the creative process, but it's not what the creative process is about. And it's always changing. And, the dramaturge may very well be involved from the beginning (or not). So all of these new ways of creating the theatrical event require different moments of intervention by the various collaborators involved. And that will also mean that the role of the writer--the role of the playwright--will change significantly. I'm happy to see this trend, because the theatrical event, its focus, is about the performer, about the performance . . . . and the exchange that happens between performers and audience. I think there are many, many places where we can learn about these things--both from ritual performances in various places as well as paratheatrical phenomena in various places--and we can draw into this a new sense of what a theatrical event is. Also, we can question whether the theatrical event is encased in a piece of real estate that we have come to know as the theatre organization, or the theatre building, because maybe some pieces should happen somewhere else. And that's another dramaturgical issue, I believe.

JUDITH RUDAKOFF:

I think the dramaturge in Canada has begun to realize--as the playwrights have begun to realize--that the future of theatre is not naturalist/realist or classical, and that scenographers--or theatrical choreographers or imagists or whatever you want to call them--are at least as important to our theatrical form as people who write dialogue. Dramaturges have found themselves in the position of having to interpret different languages.

In a playwriting workshop that I did, there were people who didn't write a word all year, but were creating with images, creating performance pieces, creating dance theatre. It's the same work, it's just translated into a different language. So that instead of editing somebody's text, you're editing their image-making, or you're editing their soundscape. It's the same dramaturgical skill of cutting away what doesn't have to be there, taking away what is obscuring the truth, and making the person communicate what it is they want to communicate in the most effective manner. Nobody ever said it had to be on paper, and nobody ever said it had to have anything to do with the written word or with text. I've done work with dance theatre as well, and, it's begun to train me to think in images, rather than simply in verbal communicative terms. But I think we're only now coming to the level of the art form in this country where we're realizing that, because of people like Robert Lepage, Robert Desrosiers--and there are many others as well. We're a little bit behind the rest of the world. I think the dramaturge fulfils an even more important function in that sort of theatre because you do need the objective pair of eyes to say whether things are clear--precisely because you can't rely on what's written down any more.